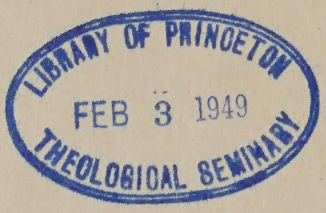
WHAT CAN WE BELIEVE?

VERGILIUS FERM



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What can we believe?

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WHAT CAN WE BELIEVE?

BY

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OF THE HOME CIRCLE

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The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology
First Adventures in Philosophy
First Chapters in Religious Philosophy
What is Lutheranism?
Contemporary American Theology (in two volumes)
Religion in Transition
An Encyclopedia of Religion
Religion in the Twentieth Century

Preface

THE PREFACE to this little book is to be found in its first chapter. There is stated its conscious purpose and the kind of circle of readers to whom it is especially directed. Only a further word may, perhaps, be added.

For a good many years it has been my privilege to supply vacant pulpits in various Protestant communions as an extracurricular activity, a kind of release from the routine of the academic life and a laboratory for thoughts nourished in a school-room. My experience in that capacity has been greatly enriched by these contacts. I have been particularly impressed by the widespread observation how hungry people in the traditional churches are for a kind of breath of fresh air in the interpretation of religious themes, for a more down-to-earth explanation of religious beliefs and practices. A frequent question heard from them is: Where can we find a little book which will, in the simplest terms, give us something understandable about the whys and wherefores of religion, a discussion of what the church is for, something more in the spirit of the newer knowledge about the Bible and the value of traditional beliefs, and similar questions. I tell them that there are scores of such books, wonderful helps toward re-appraising such values. When confronted by the suggestions coming directly from the pews of such churches that I myself write such a book—not too far removed from the type of pulpit discussions rendered—this was a motivation too difficult to ignore, especially by one who himself is thrilled by the subject of reli-

gious thought and who tingles with excitement in anticipation of and more particularly with participation in the coming to life of new books.

The immediate occasion, then, of the appearance of this volume is an invitation from the pews. But it is not altogether that. For many years now, I have been teaching a course in the philosophy of religion and have been refreshingly stirred by the ideas which students bring to the class-room. I owe them much, especially for their compulsion to keep the pencil of one's thoughts sharpened lest what is said or written become too vague and inconsequential to their own sharp ways of thinking. Some of the discussion here presented thus plainly reflects the goings-on of a typical class-room of college students and their teacher. Much of the substance, if not the form, however, of the book dates back to a series of lectures of some ten years ago presented at Auburn Theological Seminary (Presbyterian), Auburn, New York—before an organized class of some hundred ministers interested in the general topic of religious philosophy. I think especially of that fine group as some of the material now being included in this book recalls to mind spirited discussions in that lecture hall and outside of it, discussions which have ripened into friendships. One of the senior colleagues on the faculty that summer was the late Doctor Shailer Mathews, for many years dean of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. We had hours of conversation together upon questions which were raised in my own note-book and I recall now not only the stimulation of his thought but his friendly encouragement to publish the Auburn lectures even though I then was certain that they bore ideas which needed further reflective fermentation.

To the College of Wooster and particularly to my friend, Howard Lowry, its president, I acknowledge with appreciation the sabbatical year for study which has afforded the time,

the type of surroundings and the inclination to work on some literary projects, one of which is realized in the publication of this little volume.

VERGILIUS FERM

Mercer Lake
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CHAPTER I

Some First Principles

TRYING TO SOLVE the riddles of the Universe is the business of the *philosopher.* The theories relating to them constitute the subject-matter of *philosophy.* The typically *religious* person claims, however, not only to possess the answers to some of the more important questions of the Universe but he is possessed by them. He is a committed person, to some view of life and the Universe. When a philosophy is deeply believed and felt it becomes *a religion.*

To work out the answers to life's ultimate meaning, i.e., *to philosophize,* is an intensely interesting experience. To develop a religion which is grounded in carefully worked-out convictions is a rewarding possession—especially in a day, such as this, when all the older traditions of man have come in for searching criticism and revaluation.

Some of us have from childhood been handed ready-made theories about life and destiny, theories grown sacred by the prestige of centuries, vaguely known as "the faith of the fathers" or "the church's faith"; others of us have beliefs picked up here and there in the ongoing of our developing experiences, ideas which are not too clear or precise or connected, ideas which are admittedly dangling in the mid-air of confusion; while still others are on the conscious search for some "over-all" interpretation of our own which may become more reasonable and vital to us—more reasonable in terms of our everyday manner of thinking and more vital because

we ourselves have worked thoughtfully upon them to the point where tradition means less and personal conviction more.

One can never claim to have deeply personal and genuinely satisfying beliefs about the world if one settles his accounts without first having been unsettled himself. It is no sin to doubt unless it is sinful to have a reasoning mind. Doubt is sinful only to a mind that uses it as a means to self-insulation and as a stubborn resistance to heroic possibilities. To have been in the state of confused wonder about life's ultimate meaning and then to have thought oneself through to some sturdy convictions capable of standing the stress and strain of honest doubts is a rewarding experience indescribably rich to those who have known it. Such people possess a religion, then, that wears well under the pressures of everyday existence, immeasurably enriching life and sustaining it over the rougher edges.

All of us have a religion of one kind or another, a way of looking at life to which we are consciously or unconsciously committed. But this does not mean that our religion is good or reasonable or as vital as it should be. The kind we ought to have should be something more than that which squares with a tradition or a custom. To possess one that is vital we must have an ownership which we can really call our own, a kind that will click for us in terms of our everyday experience, one that is for our age as fresh and energizing as the religion proclaimed by genuinely religious people in days now gone. But our religion can hardly be the same at each point as our fathers'. If it were, it would be dead or second-handed and superficial. What was good enough for our fathers is not good enough for us any more than last year's seasons are a substitute for this year's spring. Each generation and individual, alive to anything, must know the growing

process of fresh buds and new growths, otherwise they are caught up in last year's fruitage which passed into the sterility of autumn and the frigidity of winter. To count oneself as belonging to some historic religion may mean no more than to speak with honor about what happened last year or centuries ago. The springtime of our fathers' faith is not our springtime. As it was for them, so it is for us: a something that has to be renewed as we move on in the changing and enriching experiences of life. Thus shall it be for our children and our children's children.

All books are written presumably for some purpose and directed to a definite circle of readers. This one is consciously so.

It is not directed to the surly skeptic, the kind of person who is too hard-boiled to be warmed up further. It is not for the simple, trusting believer who naively acquiesces in the religious thinking of his church or tradition. Rather, it is to that large middle-class of persons which has been reared in a positive religious tradition but toward which it has become lukewarm because winter has set in. Such persons find in the old folk ways no signs of spring because they have lost their way around in a cultural climate that is different. Such persons have sentimental affection for their heritage and are sorry about their loss. They are children of fine old churches—children of all ages, young and old. Some of them nominally "belong" to their fathers' temples but they follow from a distance; some are still sitting in the pews of churches although they know not why, other than that to them their church is a respectable heritage, a promise of something beyond the shadows, and an anchorage in time of stress for them and their children. They say, if asked, that they possess a religion; but if pressed, admit that deep down they are not too religious about it; at least, it is not for them the intense

experience it was for those of yesterday who urged their committal.

If such people could express themselves in some articulate way, perhaps they would say that it is not so much the old spirit of their inheritance that is giving them the trouble, but rather, it is the philosophy, the ideas, the beliefs which go along with the old religion—at least, the way they are presented in the church school, in the hymn books, in the public prayers, in the literature, or the discourses from the platforms up front.

To such people—hundreds of them encountered in the churches and many hundreds more in the college class-room—this book is written. Underlying these pages, although not always articulated, is a diagnosis of the religious pathology of such persons, a pathology not of spirit but of beliefs and a suggested prognosis to restored health. It is not a book for those professionals for whom the way of the founding fathers was not hard to follow and for whom a lost generation stands condemned. It is specifically for those who are looking for help toward a kind of religious philosophy which may lay reasonable claim to the title "Christian" but hopefully more adaptable to their questioning minds, critical enough to be respectable but at the same time not so critical as to have lost a vital and reasonable faith in the sanity of life and the essentials of the finer things of tradition.

But where and how shall we begin? Many discussions of religious beliefs start somewhere at the top and come down (if they come down at all). How can we begin way up there when we are still down here, groping around with questions which are problems for us even though for others they may seem so simple? A critic of this chapter has remarked that it is altogether too simple, that its author altogether misjudges the minds of those who are perplexed. He suggested its

elimination and a direct plunge into deeper waters. There is, let it be admitted, something more dramatic about a quick plunge into the whirl of ideas. But why try to make that plunge without first having done a little wading and paddling about—especially if one is a stranger to the whirl of critical reflection? This book is unashamedly simple because it is to simple people that it is directed. And the way to begin for beginners is to begin from down below—at the first step or, to return to the figure, to a little paddling around for the "feel" of the waters of critical inquiry. One has to begin somewhere. This book begins with the simplest things. What we here call "Fundamental Principles" are the simple beginnings of religious inquiry, principles which must be assumed if one is to think through further about the ultimate questions of a religious faith. A word of counsel, then, is offered. Let us take some of these simple steps, reading our way through this book, by successive pages, rather than skipping here and there to perhaps more inviting topics. No one need to have much in the pattern of his beliefs as he begins here; but, it is hoped, such a pattern may emerge if he follows straight through with the steps suggested. A popular way of putting it, we say we begin with "scratch" and then hopefully move on toward a constructive and a reasonable faith.

Much as the physical culturist sets up basic principles to good health, advice about "getting out into the open air" or "breathing deeply" or "watching one's diet," so the philosopher may set up rules applicable to the whole structure of wholesome beliefs. We may say of them that they are "trite" but that is not to minimize their importance. Things close at hand are often the hardest to recognize; but once recognized they are important enough to be mentioned. There are "first principles," guides to sound beliefs. To be told, for instance, that no one ought ever to think that his own theory of life is

absolutely final and proved may be shocking to him if the voices he has heard in his traditional religion have enslaved his mind in utter obedience to authority; but, upon a little reflection, such a statement though simple enough becomes important as a first step to the whole structure of his religious thinking.

Let us go to the heart of the matter and begin with this very first of "First Principles." It is a good one to repeat to oneself over and over again the simple affirmation: "I am a finite being." By finite is here meant "limited."

Whatever one shall say of his views of the Universe one shall remind himself: "These are my views taken from the limited perspective of a tiny experience."

When a person pounds his fist in all cocksureness, no matter what he is saying or how sincere he is, he is to be put under suspicion. No one can say anything to which there is lacking the possibility of the other side of the matter. There are always, at the very least, two sides to every question. There is always the possibility of being wrong. Nothing short of Divinity, if Divinity there be, can give a *final* answer. We possess perspectives that are limited by training, experience, and understanding. We are finite creatures, not gods.

It is true that we have an undying thirst for final answers. Most students when they come to a philosophy class ask: "Well, just what is the answer?" They are ready to write it down, salt it away in their notes, reproduce it in a final quiz and file it for future reference. It is a jolt to many of them to be told that for them there are no final answers. All positions that men take on every question are problematic.

May not this thirst, so humanly general, be indicative that we belong to some wider, intelligible environment? Animals do not care about the Universe. They have no thirst for knowledge, to say nothing about ultimate questions. Human

beings do care to know about the world that produced them. They have been hungering and thirsting for a clue to the meaning of life as far back as we can trace their intelligible actions in known history. Man is a superior animal. He asks more questions than he can answer. The very fact that he asks them, that he is restless until he thinks he can find some answers that will satisfy, is indicative that he belongs to the higher reaches of Existence. It may be the Spirit of spirits which haunts him, ceaselessly pointing to that *finality* which belongs only to Itself.

To hold a philosophy of life which is taken to be absolutely final, rests, then, upon the false assumption that we are gods rather than sons of men. Let us be more humble and ask instead: What beliefs seem to us, at this stage of our development and experience, most adequate? We shall change our theories as we grow. For us there is no oracle at Delphos or any place else. A creative Divinity which brings forth creatures less than Divinity cannot ask or expect the wisdom beyond itself. Let this be the first lesson. It will save us embarrassment later on. It makes the task at once easier; we are not subject to the compulsion of trying to become messiahs. Our beliefs like every scientific theory are problematic. No respectable scientist pounds his fist with an *ex cathedra* authority. We are all *seekers*, going from more to more.

A second rule follows as a corollary. If I am a finite being and thus cannot construct a system of beliefs which will be absolutely final, does this mean that I have, therefore, no truth at all? Are my beliefs, then, purely hit and miss propositions without any roots in life's ultimate meaning? The answer here is: a thousand times "No." I may not know for sure, I may not know except in part, and still know.

This water in my cup taken from the sea of Galilee may not reveal the entire character of the water of the sea of Galilee

(for another cup from that same sea may reveal something more); yet, though I do not know for sure how much my cup reveals, it may reveal more of the character of that sea than I can be certain. I shall always wonder how much my little cup of information reveals the sea of Reality. I shall, of course, try to obtain further samples. Nevertheless, perhaps the little I have reveals more than I can demonstrate. Or, stated differently: to say that because we do not know everything about something we therefore know nothing is as foolish as to say that because we know something about something we know everything about it. I may, in other words, know in part and still know.

There is a rather common fallacy in human thought called *argumentum ad ignorantiam.* This fallacy points out a further lesson: If you cannot prove something to be true or false, the inability to do so does not make it true or false. One may not know that he knows and still know; one may not be capable of demonstrating the truth of his beliefs and yet his beliefs may be true. The inability to demonstrate is no ground that our beliefs are true or false: they may even be true!

Our beliefs are probabilities, ranging from the barely possible to the approaching certain. Even the latter are "problematic certainties." Our beliefs must always be open to revision as they move up or down the scale of probability.

Now, if we could only realize such a simple lesson many of our mutual misunderstandings and quarrels in matters of religion could be avoided. All through religious history, as we all know, men have consigned their brethren to lower places because of their own untempered convictions and dogmatic cocksureness. That story is an open book and he who runs may read it. Let us, however, not be misled to say that if we must have our tongues in our cheek about our beliefs we must therefore regard them as of little or no worth. We

may still possess judgments which may even approach absolute truth and at the same time keep ourselves under suspect, realizing that the absolute is reserved for God.

These two rules, then, we offer as guides. They may be regarded as problematically absolute! They may be termed first, among the "first principles" in this business of constructing fundamental beliefs about our world.

Let us consider a few more such principles.

A third fundamental proposition may be put in the form of a paradox: the longest road is often the shortest. It may not be the sweetest (as one of our older popular songs had it) but it is often the surest. If there is any one major lesson that the past can teach us, it is this: there is no short and royal road to discovery and to truth. Men come to their deepest understanding by wrestling. Truths do not come to them. Men never have truths showered upon them. They forge the truth upon the anvil of hard and bitter experience.

In the widely read book *Life Begins at Forty* the author brings home the significance of this third principle. It takes a long, long time to gather the fruits of wisdom. We have to have many corners of our thinking knocked off before we approach the inner sanctum of wisdom.

I remember well when I was in the university how impatient I was when the professor posted long lists of books to be consulted by his students and assigned wholesale reading-matter. This procedure irked me, especially in philosophy courses. I thought to myself: Why doesn't he ask me what *I* think? Why does he ask me what Plato thought? Is not Plato long since dead? After all, here am I—and is it not more important what I think than what somebody ages ago has thought? I have since learned that the procedure of the professor was right. I found that I could acquire insight in a couple of hours' reading of Plato which otherwise may have

taken a life-time to work out by myself. What seemed to be the long, dull and unrewarding road was really the shorter and the surer.

History and tradition will always remain the great masters of our education. To construct a system of beliefs without consulting the greater spirits who have brooded over the riddles of the Universe would be like trying to diagnose a persistent ailment without recourse to the expert physician. No one would think of committing himself to an operation by anyone less than a first-class surgeon. And yet, there are literally thousands of people in this world who stand up and tell us what is wrong with society or what is the meaning of life who are no better equipped for such a task than the ancient medicine-man or astrologer. The world is still full of quacks—and particularly in the religious field. The wonder is that men will commit their souls to them—as if it were easier to construct a program of social reform or a theory of the Universe than to understand bodily processes or the mysteries of the stars.

It is, accordingly, axiomatic to say that wisdom comes by way of disciplined thinking. It takes a long, long time to achieve poise with one's self and to begin to come to some terms with the mysteries of life. This principle, too, is a corollary of the first: We are finite beings dealing with problems of infinite scope.

I become amused and then feel despair when I hear some college-youths or some soap-box orators standing on the platform and arguing some cause, their bodies quivering with conviction. They, of course, are doing only what has been done all along in every generation. If they would only realize how complex all problems are, they would shudder at the sound of their hollow voices and at the sight of their fists beating the air. Maturity, of course, changes all that. Students

of that age should be working in the quiet of the library or laboratory in reflection and search. Oratory and debate are good for mental discipline and for the technique of making public one's private opinions. But public persuasion often ends with the pain of conscience. Only too late some learn that only the years bring a truer perspective. We settle our accounts too soon. A gullible public may be changed by some orator, but there is no guarantee that change alone is for the better. Prophets of real progress are those who have been crowned by a deepened experience. When Plato looked out at the world and saw its utter complexities, he shuddered at the thought of immature people standing in the places of leadership. He laid down the principle for his Utopian State that only the philosopher-kings shall be kings. Only to those who have become mellow with years in the wisdom that comes from reflection and experience would he intrust the reigns of leadership. There is no short-cut road to the understanding of life.

Let us be patient. Let us wrestle before we pronounce. Let us pile the stones one by one and wait for our day. It will come soon enough—God only knows.

But, some one will interject, are there no insights which come with the earlier years? Are there no young men who have led in the way of progress? The answer is: of course, there are such insights. They happen at times and in places unsuspected. Indeed, some of the world's greater teachers have been young. Jesus of Nazareth was one and only in his thirties. Nevertheless, such cases are the exception, not the rule.* Too many of us want to be exceptions to the rule. We think that the gods owe us some special favor. We forget that we belong to the masses. Who, after all, am I to ask for or

* And yet, even he brooded a long, long time, before entering upon his ministry.

expect such favors? Would it not be more in keeping with the nature of things that I accept my rôle and share with the common lot in a common struggle? Most of us belong to common cloth. Mutations there are in nature but mutations are not the general order of nature; they are nature making only occasional shifts. Indeed, the longest road is the surest and the shortest—there is so much scenery in life to behold to come to grips with it.

In the fourth place, all building is in terms of adjustment. Even an architect will tell you that though the plans are on paper, circumstances will alter the situations. To construct is also to destroy. To learn is to unlearn. To grow is to die. In the long course of biological evolution there have been paths down as well as up. One must adjust as one develops. One must revise as one writes. Most manuscripts are full of deletes and marginal insertions. In the ongoing of experience, no two circumstances are the same. No situation is identical with any other. A plasticity of mind is a prerequisite in building a temple of beliefs. The man who boasts of not changing his views all through his maturing life has condemned himself unwittingly. A preacher's barrel of sermons neatly piled for orderly repetition soon becomes a museum of antiquity. The contemporary and the historical may be related but they are not the same. To quote the fathers is to unquote them at crucial points. Adjustment to the ever new is a principle of life and a law in the building of sound beliefs about it. A very great religious leader saw this. He well understood the changing world when he refused to write detailed rules and plans upon the parchment and, instead, laid down broad principles and left the marks of specific instructions upon the shifting sands.

Consider a fifth point. There are those who caution that one must not allow the head to rule. Our beliefs, they say,

are matters which lie outside the arena of criticism and debate. Man has a heart and, in Pascal's words, the heart has reasons which reason knows not of.

Like many striking utterances, Pascal's oft-quoted remark suffers from half-truth. It is a turn of the phrase which can be quoted only with peril. Let us look at this point more carefully.

The mind of man has been frowned upon by many defenders of a religious faith as the curse of man. But those who curse the mind have cursed by the use of mind. Those who claim a faith as beyond the area of reason employ reason in their faith. It is a strange paradox. One has to think to show that thoughts are reliable or untrustworthy. The very thought which would slay thought, therefore, stands condemned. Such people present a picture—were we to draw it in cartoon —of a species with its brain placed low upon its feet and not, as nature perhaps symbolically has placed it, poised high upon the body.

It should be set down as a fundamental principle in the building of a sound theory of life's meaning that mind is the greatest of all gifts which nature has bestowed. Those who curse reason and praise the heart exalt the desperate condition of the chicken with its head cut off running wildly about the yard without aim or purpose or meaning. Let us beware of those who would slaughter our minds in the interest of some rapturous or warm experience "of the heart."

There is a class of people called "mystics" or "intuitionists" which has tended to heap scorn upon reason. Their dilemma we have already exposed. Either a mystic must say that he has a special feeling which brings knowledge to him but which he cannot impart to others, or he must try to explain such a feeling in terms of concepts. In the first instance, he becomes a dogmatist since he cannot explain. In the second

instance, he suffers from inconsistency since he must employ reason which he denies. Those who quote authorities, sacred or otherwise, and disparage reason suffer the same dilemma. To appeal to authority or an experience without recourse to reason is dogmatism; to give reasons for such authority or experience is to land in the contradiction of an appeal to reason. The upshot of which is: whatever a man's faith is, man cannot get along well with himself without his reason. He who disparages reason condemns himself to the lowliest of creation.

It may be asked: what, after all, are intuitions? Are they special means of knowledge other than the senses and reason? I believe it can be shown that there are no such special ways of knowing. Someone has ingeniously suggested that we may have ultra-microscopic organs on our intestines which furnish stimuli to reason and that these are the special instruments of awareness about which the mystic speaks. But such microscopic organs are only sensations in miniature. The claims of intuitionists of special knowledge are, indeed, extravagant. But it must be remembered that such intuitions without reason are meaningless.

An intuition is not something all by itself. Rather, it is the name for an ordinary process of mind, a process by which mental items already acquired by our senses and reason fall together in new relations and are charged with feeling. A tree surgeon does not expect a mathematical intuition unless he delves into mathematics. Nor does the mathematician expect an intuition about plant fertilization unless he has given thought to that subject. Many religious people believe that they can come to special intuitions about life by just having them. They forget that before knowledge and insight can come, a person must have an accumulation of items relating to the particular subject. What one experiences as an imme-

diate surging of illumination, called an intuition, is the coming together of items *already* possessed, this confluence of reason and experience being charged with emotion.

Biologists remind us that life is not something apart from physical nature. The essence of life (as distinguished from the inorganic) is the peculiar arrangement or combination of chemical elements. A living thing does not differ from the non-living by a new kind of chemistry. Rather, the same physical and chemical laws hold in biology—the difference lying in organization. Life is mysterious in its combination and not in the uniqueness of elements.

Similarly, intuitions do not differ from the laws of reason. They are the same mind at work. New combinations of the elements of reason and experience give birth to the illumination we call intuition. But the illumination is not something other than reason; it is reason at work producing new combinations.

It is a grievous error to attempt to build our religious beliefs by waiting for intuitions. We shall have to think and acquire experience trusting that combinations will arise which will make for illumined understanding. Intuitions are the by-products of reason. We shall honor them not as special organs of knowledge but as products of reflection.

This leads to a further question. Is the world amenable to logic? Must we believe, then, that everything must conform to a syllogism? When we say reason, must we ignore man's emotions? Not for a moment. We may honor our emotions, as we must. But we shall not confuse them with reason. We shall think of the emotions (as the modern psychologist does) as physiological disturbances. In themselves emotions do not have knowledge-value. The emotions give color, warmth, glow to life. But they do not furnish information.

It would, indeed, be an uninteresting life if man had no

emotions. There would be no zest. He would languish in his monotony. But emotions standing alone lead men to destruction. We have to learn to curb them, to put them in harness. No leadership can be entrusted where emotions hold sway. Reason must sit in the seat and hold the reins.

Since emotional disturbances are part of man, his reason must appraise them. Let us make this clear. Two people are in love. They are "disturbed" about each other. The disturbance called love, of mutual attraction, tends to crowd out the rational. We say of two lovers that we cannot *understand* them; they act "silly," i.e., non-rationally. Lovers will testify that the attraction, the kind of disturbance they call love, is not reasoned out in the higher thought-processes. It is biological before it is psychological. Our emotional life reverts to the days when our ancestors lived closer to the level of sheer disturbance and unreason, the level of the animal kingdom. Emotions have biological utility. Animals do not reason out the necessity for procreation; they procreate on the non-rational level. Sex-attraction dates from the forest primeval long before the brain had developed its full powers. It continues on the pre-rational level—a necessity to the survival of the species, a gift of nature for the sake of nature. What we call "love" has its basis in a biological function.

Now, this is a "reasonable" interpretation of one fundamental expression of the emotional life. Our feelings are not unintelligible or anti-rational; they are "reasonable" in the total scheme of things. But in themselves they are below the level of reason. Reason, thus, may understand emotions even though emotions, in themselves, are beyond reason.

We see, then, for an adequate philosophy of life, it is required that we think of reason in two ways: in terms of logical analysis and in terms of a larger reasonableness. While many experiences of life may conform to the rules of logic,

others conform only to the pattern of a more encompassing reasonableness. The emotional life is a case of such reasonableness and not one of logic. We can see the "why" and "wherefore" of our feelings in terms of a large pattern or function of biological nature. It follows, then, as a principle of good thinking, not to make everything fit into hard and cold logic but to find a place for everything in the framework of a larger pattern of meaning. This is to *understand* emotions. This is to employ reason in the larger way and not to eschew it as do some builders of the temple of faith.

William James, the widely known Harvard professor of two generations ago, preached a doctrine somewhat similar to his students of philosophy. That view, he said in substance, which takes into its area man's whole nature, his volitions, his needs, his desires, his emotions, his "instincts," as well as his theories, i.e., his total self, is the one to be preferred as the more true as over against the view which takes into its area only man's logical nature. Thus, the extreme mystic who stresses the emotional life must be included in the total picture. He must be seen as one whose emotions have disturbed his equilibrium in his scorn of reason. He will be honored not as the scorner of reason but as one who reminds us how significant are the emotions in the life of biological man. He must not be discounted for what he is but only as to his extravagant claims.

Let us build our temple committed fully to reason, but let reason be understood to include "reasonableness." Life, indeed, is more than cold, formal logic. When people hate or love one another, such reactions are understandable in terms of large biological patterns and, in some cases, in terms of the logic of the situation; in most cases, however, they react emotionally at levels below logic yet, reasonably, in terms of biological patterns.

It follows from our fifth principle that when man claims a revelation, we must use reason to evaluate and understand his claims. We must question them. Too many prophets of revelation have walked across the path of men and misled them to permit our following them indiscriminately. We shall not deny the possibility of revelations. We shall, at their best, think of them as "the over-side" of discoveries. Revelation and discovery are not opposites. They are to each other much as the convexity of a curve ("the over-side") is to its concavity ("the underneath side")—that is, they both "are" at the same time but each is viewed from a different aspect. Man does not get such information without background. This is the rule. Those who claim a special revelation, either by way of special intuition or by a supernatural intrusion of some alleged authority, without a struggle, without brooding, without the use of his own reason,—we shall plainly question. Revelations of worth come by way of disciplined discoveries, by "background." This is the normal procedure of life.

There is a sixth point. Cease to look for proofs. The word "proof" carries the note of finality. If a thing is proved, there is nothing more to be said; the argument is over; the case is dismissed. The word "proof" may be employed, by grace, only in relation to certain premises. When one "proves" a thing, one proves it only in terms of what one has started with. There is always the necessity of disputing those premises. It would be much more reasonable to employ the word "probabilities" with the qualifying adjectives "high" or "low." If a person would cease asking for proofs, "the end of the matter," and, instead, be content to go along with nature which proceeds from more to more in a changing series of events, he will understand himself better and come better to grips with life. "How do you prove that?" asks the beginning student of philosophy. Let the answer be: "Nothing

is absolutely proved, not even the statement." Let us be more humble; let us put away such childish and immature demands. Let us learn to ask from nature the visions which are appropriate only to finite minds: problematic answers and, at most, problematic certainties.

A seventh principle may be stated in terms of a warning and as a guide. It is this. Our beliefs about life will reflect our cultural experience. A Hottentot's theory of life will reflect the Hottentot culture. The Winnebago Indian will talk about the Universe in terms of his cultural experiences. A research man of the twentieth-century will reflect in his views of God his professional interests. And, so all the way. The warning is that we must judge anyone's theory of life in terms of his cultural pattern.

I will, for example, temper my judgment of the soap-box orator's tirade against the capitalistic system in the light of the injustices he suffers at the hands of some unscrupulous boss and in terms of his type of reading and social contacts. His general background marks him. I will view his theory not so much as either wrong or right but as a reflection of something else which is wrong or right. I will remind myself that had he another environment he most likely would be singing another tune.

On the other hand, I will realize that my own environment plays into my philosophy. These chapters as they are now being written reflect the author's cultural pattern. The same rule requires of the reader that he make similar judgment. Our cultural patterns divide our philosophies of life and bring to them their limitations. A reasonable philosophy can be built only as we recognize these grand divisions of experience. All this will make us conscious of our limitations and keep us from pounding our fist in terms of finality. There are, we shall find, more things in heaven above and earth

below than are dreamed of in our own private cultural experiences.

This same principle has been stated in another and more forcible way. The principle has been called that of "reality feeling." It is this: that which concerns us from day to day will become psychologically real to us; or, conversely stated, that which does not concern us from day to day becomes unreal. I have, for instance, no reality-feeling for worms. I hardly ever think of them. They tend to become unreal for me. If somebody got excited about them, I should have a queer feeling about that somebody. On the other hand, there are professional people who spend a life-time studying worms and their habitats. They live and move and have their professional being with worms. They can get all excited about some worm-specimen. They may write long articles about them. A worm-specialist may regard his calling as one of the most significant of professions. You would, then, mistrust me on worms and take seriously the helminthologist who studies them. That is to say, you would show discrimination of backgrounds in your judgment unless your own interests blind you. We come now to an application of this principle.

If a noted man tells me that it is foolish to speculate about the nature of the Universe, the meaning of life, about God, about the possibility of immortality, I shall judge his pronouncement in terms of his reality-feeling. If he is a Burbank, expert on potatoes, I shall mistrust his voice on the Universe at large. If he be a Ford, I shall mistrust him on immortality. I shall prefer to go to Plato, to Aristotle, or to Aquinas who have given themselves to the study of such questions. However, I will rush to a Burbank for information about soil and to the Fords about the V-type engine. I shall learn to weigh authorities in terms of the reality-feeling principle.

On the other hand, I shall also keep in mind that everyone

suffers limitations because of his interests. What some people ignore and tend to deny shall be balanced by what others say who brood upon and tend to affirm. Those who exult in some view because of their interests will be balanced by those who scoff because of lack of interest.

The result of this principle leads directly to another. As an eighth point we set down the observation: principles of various grades can be formulated as guides for thinking. Some of them are broad, very broad. Others are narrow and very narrow. And there are shades all the way between. The broad principles are those which approach the universal; the narrow principles are those which approach the temporary and the provincial. In constructing our beliefs we shall have to watch these distinctions. When I realize that I am circumscribed by my interests (my reality-feeling), I must guard myself lest the provincial crowd out the universal.

Water is wet. This is a broad principle. Water in general is wet. This is about as universal as one can say on that particular subject. On the other hand, suppose I say, "This is the best water in the world." I have now left the broad field and become specific. Here I invite disputation. The more specific one becomes in a statement, the less "universal" it is. To lay down principles as guides to building a philosophy of life requires that one keep in mind broad principles.

As an illustration, perhaps the greatness of Jesus Christ lay in his refusal to circumscribe himself to too detailed statements. The orthodox in his day were offended at him because he did not fit into their detailed plans. Judaism of that time was a religion of details. It is significant to note that he spoke frequently in parables. In a parable the general point is the real point rather than the particulars contained therein. It has been a common and serious error of Christians of understanding him to say what he did not intend, by interpreting

him in terms of details and the provincial rather than by the universals which the record suggests characterized his teachings.

Many of our ideas of ethical living, similarly, fall short because they are set to the tune of particulars. Is it wrong to do so and so? "Yes," says the one whose principles are circumscribed. "It depends," says the one whose principles are larger. What is wrong for one person in a given situation is not necessarily wrong for another. It all depends upon circumstances, motives, ends. A given conduct is right or wrong not in itself; it must be seen in terms of its context. This is what we mean by our eighth point. One must grade principles, beginning at the base with the broadest and the most universal and then narrow them at the top with those principles which are only relative to specific contextual situations. Many, many beliefs about life are hopelessly inadequate because the provincial has become the universal. We call people with such philosophies "narrow," "bigoted," "intolerant," "shortsighted," "impossible." We shall find that our general principles become fewer but they become, at the same time, more fundamental and catholic.

When universal principles are applied to particular situations they take on a certain relative character. This statement accords with the first principle we have named: the finite is always limited, the specific is always less than the general. Professor John Dewey formerly of Columbia University has somewhere defined the good, as a principle, as the-no-matter-how-bad getting better. Conversely, he has defined the bad as the-no-matter-how-good getting worse. This is a principle which can be universally applied. It is a general rule, a general definition. It takes into its view all situations. Goodness is a matter of degree. It is also a matter of comparison. No bad, no good; no good, no bad. Both goodness and badness

are values in terms of other values and relative to more or to less.

Let us apply this "universal" to a given situation, say to smoking. Is smoking good or bad? For Joe Smith the principle (stated above) works one way; for Tom Jones it works another. For the situations of Joe Smith and Tom Jones are not identical. The one has a stomach which cannot take care of nicotine; the other has a high strung nervous system which demands some means of relaxation. The principle holds as a universal; but applied it becomes relative to specific factors. In the one case the good becomes bad and in the other the bad becomes the good. In both cases, however, the good and the bad follow the general principles as stated.

What we say of this particular principle and its concrete application can be said of any other principle. The more general the statement the more universal; when the general is stated in particular cases it still obtains as a guide but it becomes relativized in application. This, we suggest, is another first principle to observe in coming to terms with adequate beliefs.

There are, of course, more "first principles." We have confined ourselves to a sample of those which apply more directly to the task of building the temple of beliefs about our world and its meaning for us.

CHAPTER II

Things Which Stand in the Way

THERE ARE NO greater obstacles to the building of a temple of sound beliefs about the world than the prejudices and ill-conceived notions which we have consciously or unconsciously adopted. Let us consider some of these.

Many people cannot believe in God because of their idea of what God is. They have perhaps gotten an ill-conceived notion of Deity from some naive Sunday-school teacher who never grew out of a religious childhood. Old ideas and superstitions have a way of clinging in spite of maturing thoughts. Some grown-up people still cross their fingers when they ride over a bridge, or always carry a penny in their pocketbook, or cautiously curb their activities on Friday the thirteenth. Though they have adopted the ideas of a mature person in most areas of interest, they still carry pet prejudices in others. Though normally matured and grown-up they still play with toy-ideas of God and of religion.

God visualized as a regal old man on the throne with a bewhiskered face and with a scepter in his right hand is no longer real to a matured person. A Book of Life upon which an angelic secretary writes down the detailed will of God is a belief reserved for children. A St. Peter who stands as a kind of ticket-taker at the heavenly gate is an amusing fable. A heaven that is up in the sky is a conception all out of joint with present-day astronomical architecture.* Hell is supposed

* And yet in an American religious weekly (Nov. 7, 1940) a minister with a respectable college and theological training writes thus: "Let us live . . . so that we may meet Him in the sky when He comes." Eph. IV:17

to be in the bowels of the earth; but what sane person, except a geologist, worries about what is below?

There are people today who say that they do not "believe in the Bible" because of something about Cain's wife; because of the impossibility of all the species of animals having enough room aboard Noah's boat; because of the amazing story of the fall of Jericho's walls at the sound of trumpets and the march of feet; because water was supposed to have been parted miraculously to allow a path for certain Hebrews and then to have come together again to drown the enemy; because the infant Moses did not drown in the water as he lay in the leaky basket waiting for the lady-in-waiting to pick him up; because there were only six days of creation; because Jesus walked on the top of the water; because Lazarus was revived from the state of cold death; or because of the architectural features of the New Jerusalem.

One still hears reputable people pass the most childish remarks about religion, about religious ideas, about the Bible, speaking as if they were six-year olds rather than mature individuals. The fact of the matter is that in their busy life they have grown to full stature in some one, two, or three fields of their interest and they have lost track of developing religious ideas. They recall the religious concepts learned years ago in church pews and provincial Sunday schools. They have grown up with ideas in their own field, but they are still the merest children in religious matters. They say they cannot believe in their grandfathers' religion any more; and they seem to infer that they, sons of the grandfathers, have outgrown all religion. They have not allowed their religious ideas to grow with the rest of their experience.

If such people could only realize how much water in the past two generations has gone under the bridge in the world of religious thought, now common knowledge among those

who are sufficiently concerned to be informed, they would never continue to think of religion as they do. To say disparaging things about the Bible because of the record of certain allegedly preposterous tales is as childish as to say that education is foolishness because of some of the things that went on in the little red school-house long years ago under the guidance of old-fashioned texts and an impossible schoolmaster. Religious ideas must undergo revision as anything else. Old criticisms become as antiquated as the ideas criticized. Tom Paine is dead. So is Robert Ingersoll. Their tirades against religion are as obsolete today as hoop-skirts. We would no more today think of quoting them against the Bible than we would think of employing the arguments of yesterday's skeptics who said that steam-driven trains would never run forty miles an hour because such speed would take people's breath away and the noise kill by fright the cattle in the nearby meadows.

A friend of mine who is a professional ad-writer pointed out that advertisements are generally attuned to fourteen-year-old minds. When I asked him to explain, he said that most adults are mature only in their own chosen fields, but they are fourteen-year olds in almost everything else. "For instance," he said bluntly, "suppose you were asked to start an ice and coal business. Just how would you go about it?" I had to confess I was worse off than a fourteen-year-old. Exactly so. We are the merest children in other fields than our own.

Most people find themselves having difficulties with religious beliefs because they are fourteen-year-olds in their religious thinking. Not being able to go back to the notions which they once held, they do not know how to revise and remodel. Many do not even know how to get started in the matter of beliefs; they do not know how to begin to take over the ice

and coal business. They need help. One of the greatest values of a stimulating type of church-service and of a first-class type of adult-class in a religious institution is to help people reframe antiquated ideas when they have so little time and discipline to think through for themselves the questions which arise in connection with the great themes about the Universe.

Another thing which stands in the way of this matter of believing follows closely upon what has been said. There is a feeling that traditional doctrines inherited from our fathers are too many, too ponderous, too involved, that there is no point to them—at least, for us of this generation. Why do we need (they ask) to pay attention to such trivial matters as concerned the makers of our inherited creeds? Is not a "good life" sufficient? Why bother our heads about all those beliefs handed down from generation to generation?

When people speak disparagingly of traditional doctrines they, for the most part, reveal their lack of historical perspective and appreciation. Take, for example, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine was once the burning question of the Christian Church. It was as much discussed in an earlier day as was the question of organic evolution a quarter of a century ago in this country. The debate on the Trinity gave birth to the first great general church convention in the history of the Christian Church. So important was the question that it later made cause of theological division between Greek and Roman Catholicism. Christian leaders, including bishops, were excommunicated from the church because of doubtful views with reference to it. The emperor Constantine spent a lot of money getting together the churchmen who quarrelled over the matters involved; and after him the controversy continued with bitterness for more than fifty years.

Now, we say: was not all that a lot of foolishness? Why bother our heads about such matters? Is a religion that gets

itself so mixed up with abstract theories worthy of our concern?

But let us take a closer look at the matter. Do we realize that underlying the doctrine of the Trinity there were great theoretical and practical issues at stake? What were they? The question was that of the relation between Jesus and God. Here were men who, because of his life and teachings, held Jesus in the very highest regard. Such a person, they were convinced, was not an ordinary human being. He seemed to measure up when all others fall short of the glory of God. In this he was so unlike the sons of men. He must *somehow* be uniquely divine. On the other hand, here is God, the Creative Principle, Maker of heaven and earth. How can these two be held to be divine without a belief in two divinities? Moreover, they said, there is a Holy Spirit, an immanent spirit, a third Entity, which also claims man's veneration. It, too, is also somehow divine. But how? The Trinitarian formula was an ingenious attempt to give the highest honors where they were felt due and at the same time avoid the position of polytheism (many gods). The Jewish tradition held that the first great commandment was to honor but one god (monotheism). This fundamental doctrine must never be violated. The Trinitarian formula was fashioned to preserve the belief in one God and to include Jesus and the Holy Spirit. With the help of Greek philosophy the belief took this form: there is one essence but that essence is embodied in three characters: the three embodiments are one and the one is threefold in embodiment.*

From a practical point of view, Jesus' relation to God was of vital significance. For, if he brought men the true way to

* The Latins later translated "embodiment" by their word *persona* which still later was given a somewhat unfortunate translation; the Trinitarian formula does not in itself historically argue for three persons.

God and salvation, did he bring it in the name of Deity or was it merely just another bit of human wisdom? The worship of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is sacrilegious unless they are somehow God. Certainly it is a form of idolatry unless there is present in both the essential character of Divinity.

Thus, *viewed historically*, it should be clear, the Trinitarian doctrine met a real need. A tribute is due to the Christian fathers that they were capable of some clean-cut philosophical thinking. If many of us, in our generation, find our interests less philosophical and theological, we can at least pay our respects to those who were concerned about making their faith conform to the demands of their reason. It is necessary to understand the background of that time to appreciate such a doctrine. We may not be so vitally concerned with some of the questions which intrigued our fathers; on the other hand, our unconcern might well be a cause for pity of us were the fathers to judge our generation. It all depends on perspective: where we are and what issues are at stake.

Instead, then, of speaking harshly of traditional doctrines as so much lumber, let us, rather, say that we ought to try to appreciate them for what they were worth. We shall not let such doctrines stand in the way of our own matters of belief, but we shall evaluate them intelligently and with discrimination and learn from them. This matter of believing requires that we not only have the proper sense of values but an appreciation of the things that have gone before. We have taken the doctrine of the Trinity as an example. There are hundreds of such traditional doctrines, anyone of which could be made plausible and significant were we to get the feel of yesterday's problems.

Let us consider another so-called obstacle to matters of belief. It used to be said that men's beliefs reflect their own wishful thinking; they believe what they wish to believe and

that is all of the truth and reality there is in them. Beliefs reflect men's wishes and their frustrated desires. Let us, we are told, take them as a reflection of men rather than of any reality outside.

Now, what can be said about such a difficulty? The answer is very simple. It is the same answer that one gives when one is confronted by the charge of anthropomorphism (a horrible word). When one is thus charged, one is said to have made God in one's own image; so, why make anything more out of it than that image? Well, to such a remark it can be said: Yes, of course, men have wishes; men do fashion their beliefs in terms of their own experiences. Of course; of course. But what of it? I look with my eyes and see the world. The world I see is the world I see. But I do not therefore say that there is no world-out-there just because the world I see is the world I see with my eyes. The fact that I see with my own eyes, experience with my own experiences, think with my own thoughts, does not compel me to say that that world is merely the reflection of my eyes, my experience, my thoughts, myself. I may have my wishes and my hopes. True, they may reflect very much of myself. But there is the very real possibility that my hopes and wishes are revelations not only of myself but of the Universe Itself, revelations comparable to those given in seeing with my own eyes, with my auditory sense, or in my thinking. Nature has produced both me and my thoughts as well as my senses; it has also produced my wishes and my hopes. What I wish and hope may well be revelatory of the Nature which has produced me and my wishes and hopes.

The charges of wishful thinking, of anthropomorphism, are very precarious charges. Their value lies in pointing out the necessity of checking upon ourselves lest we allow imagination to take charge over disciplined thinking. The fallacy of these charges lies in concluding that because we think with

our minds, have our hopes, build our visions, therefore, there is nothing more to them.

If I went out with a fishing line and hook and dropped it into the water and pulled up a fish, I would not say that the fish is a line-hook fish. Just because I catch a fish with a line-hook I do not say that the fish wears a line-hook. Ideas, wishes, hopes, like fishing lines, may be tools by which we catch the nature of reality. Just because we have to use them is no reason at all that there is no reality, no something-out-there, beyond them. Let that charge never bother us. It is thin; and among the well-informed it no longer gives concern.

Consider another alleged difficulty in the matter of beliefs. Suppose I have some very bitter experience with someone. The person, let us say, owes me a payment for some service and refuses to acknowledge the debt. I find myself in need of that payment and I am given to understand that the person although well able to make it, deliberately refuses. My feelings of resentment are aroused. Now, whenever feelings are aroused judgment gets colored, gets touched up. It is no longer a sane, cool, level-headed judgment. I am no longer merely rational; I am angry, disturbed. What happens? My feeling in the matter tends to spread over my judgments. Under emotional stress I no longer think of the person in a logical way; I forget his virtues and the many times we were happy together in our friendship. I now am moved to think only of all those things that fit in with and sustain my bitter feeling. I begin to recall easily what was told me about that individual years ago which I then did not believe. I now think only of everything negative in his make-up. My feeling expands and colors all my judgments. Before very long, I have made him out to be a first-class rascal.

There is a psychological law that we tend to judge according to our feelings, our likes and dislikes. Our judgments

under emotional disturbances are rarely clean-cut or rational. They are distorted to the degree and pattern of our present feelings. Our feelings play over the whole landscape. We ought, accordingly, to be aware how easily we become logically and rationally distorted.

Some people have difficulty with their beliefs about the world and life just because of such emotional distortion. I know of a man, for example, who was reared in a State Church across the sea. As a boy he was sent to church, confirmed, and received into membership. He was compelled to learn the catechism by heart and he could, after many years, recite long passages from memory. It so happened that when he was a young man he decided he wanted to come to this country to strike out for himself. It was the day when get-rich-quick stories were rampant and the great land across the sea held out great promises. He wanted to join others in the great adventure. But in order to leave his homeland he had to secure the necessary documents relating to his birth and citizenship. In that country such records were kept by the church and the minister as the official custodian of them had to sign and give the proper papers. It so happened that this young man's minister did not have the mind to give him the necessary credentials. Just why, I do not know. Perhaps there was an objection on the part of the family. At any rate, this youth stole out of the country, a fugitive and a stowaway. This he did successfully.

The years found him settled in a midwestern town in America, a relatively comfortable and happy man. He never got over that experience with his church and his minister. It was my duty, at one time, to call on him and invite him to share in the work of his local church, a daughter-church to that of his homeland. I found him bitter. He railed against the catechism, against ministers, against the church, against re-

ligion, against Christianity. He could see no good in such matters. Had he not gotten along beautifully without them? What had his father's religion, his church, his minister at home done to help him when he needed some encouragement? He vowed he would never set foot in a church again. And he never did, so far as I know. It was whispered about in the community that he was an atheist; and some more quiet whispers had him already in hell.

Now, what was the matter here? Plainly, it was the case of one bitter experience which had expanded to cover everything which had to do with religion. There was for this man not one iota of good in the whole area of religious beliefs and expressions because judgments in that direction were always colored. One feeling of bitter disappointment had spread itself, altogether illegitimately, to the whole landscape of religion. Religious beliefs were made out for him to be but just so many pious expressions of men's impiety toward man. Perhaps he was justified in the one instance. That he was unjustified in splashing his feelings the way he did, anyone can readily see. Note that it was psychological and not logical. His logic was built upon and out of his feeling.

Not for one moment should we discount feelings. All of us—and not this man alone—possess beliefs or unbeliefs colored by them. We tend to believe the things we like to believe and in time to disbelieve whatever our emotional tone forbids. But to say that our beliefs must be discounted because of our emotions is to admit the charge of wishful thinking (already discussed). Our emotions do count as do our hopes and desires; our beliefs must not flout our normal feelings; on the other hand, we must employ reason to check our emotions as well as our flights of wishful imaginations. Life has a tremendous feeling-quality for us, but for humans

it also has a reasonable and logical side—unless this be an irrational world.

We know that when we get into moods of pessimism, when we come to feel the futility of our endeavors, when people (including ourselves) appear naked in their faults and shortcomings, a good night's rest changes the complexion of the whole. In the morning at a summer's camp, the world looks good, even the weeds. Our attitude towards our immediate family takes on a different glow with a breakfast of ham and eggs and fried potatoes before us. Our philosophy of life can change completely over night. From discouragement there emerges resolution and hope; from grumbling and despair there comes a new enthusiasm. The world takes on a different color with a changed feeling-tone. It is wonderful what a good night's rest does to us.

If it is true that our beliefs are colored by our emotions, that is to say, that our positive as well as our negative beliefs are thus colored, we ask then: Which sets of beliefs are more favorable and probably more representative of the world and more likely true—those which emerge when our spirits are tired and our bodies are fagged or those which come with the blood flowing with power through our arteries? There is but one satisfactory answer: Nature reveals her deepest character on the side of her surgings, her expandings, her *élan vital.* Springtime and morning will always reflect Nature's most fundamental traits. Why do we say this? The answer is simple: because if winter and night and not spring and morning reveal the true character of Nature she would have perished long ago.

The whole story of evolution is the story of struggle to grow, to begin again and to move on. True, there are death and decay; but if death and decay were *fundamental,* the last chapters would have been written long ago in the depths of

the rocks to be read by no man for men would never have been there to read them. It is the same with our beliefs about the world. The times when our spirits are high, when our ideals have a glow, when there is optimism in the air, when the blood tingles and the heroic in us makes us take adventurous risks, when our beliefs in things that are good are nurtured and strengthened by the enthusiasms of living—then do we reflect the world in its deepest character. The feelings which carry us on and up, the kind which nourish corresponding hopeful beliefs are of the stuff which really reflects the deepest character of Nature. Those beliefs, then, which reach toward ideals, which are motivated by our more normal, natural and more healthy and vigorous moods are the most significant if for no other reason than were it otherwise we should never have been produced by the Nature which in its glow produced us. Let us recognize, on the other hand, that those beliefs which reflect our bitterest feelings reflect that side of Nature which runs into blind alleys, into wastelands favorable only in the bleak climate and the kind of soil which does not bring forth flowers and fruit and life. Some of our doubts represent the beliefs which are symbolic of Nature's mid-winter. And the antidote for such misgivings lies in the toning up of our health, securing for our tired bodies more rest, and being patient for the morning and the spring to come and the buds once more to sprout and blossom.

CHAPTER III

Sources of Believing

SOME YEARS AGO I attended a series of lectures given by an eminent American preacher* to preachers on the sources of sermons. The suggestions he gave were drawn from the commonplace; the manner in which he drilled home his theme made the familiar seem strangely new and overflowing with surprising thoughts.

The sum and substance of it all was that the most fruitful sources lie close by: in the everyday give-and-take experiences of people, in the wordless suggestions which appear in the book of nature, in lessons which may be drawn from the changes that come to the landscape by reason of industrial and technical expansions, in suggestions from books which come to the library table many of which have no theme of religion blazed across their pages, in the records through the ages of men who have lived much as we, in the tense and anxious moments of persons in distress, in the casual smoking-lounge conversation in the Pullman car, in the sermons of great preachers, in the utterances of men believed to be inspired—in short, from everywhere. All around us, in corners most unsuspecting, are sources for exhortations to better living and to the lifting up of our eyes to the hills. He is a fresh and inspiring preacher, so it was drilled home, whose

* I record here his name in tribute not only because he was one of America's greatest preachers of the last generation but because he shared with me the warmth of his friendship: Dr. Gaius Glenn Atkins.

mind is sensitive to the myriad of stimuli which impinge upon experience provocative of sparkling insights when rightly interpreted by impressionable minds, stimuli loaded with prophetic material on the meaning and significance of the world and life.

"I was driving along in my car, one day," he said in so many words, "when I noticed here and there along the highway an abandoned road cut off by the new concrete highway. I wondered, as I drove along, where the old roads go. . . .

"I sat and thought: some of them now lead nowhere; some of them run into somebody's cornfield; along some of them are the front doors of farm houses whose back doors now face the main highway; some of them are no longer passable, they are no longer kept up; some of them lead back in a lazily round-about way to the new main road; some of them shade into oblivion by overrun grass and weeds—Ah! Here's a sermon in the making!"

And then he went on . . .

"Life is just like that: full of change and flux; there are many old roads which no longer lead anywhere in particular, roads which take us round and round; some of them come to an end and we must turn around and go back; many of them are obsolete in a day which requires smoother and safer beds for swift moving traffic. The wise traveler will, if he can, abandon them and connect with the new main highway over the hill. . . . Many religious people today still live along abandoned roads; they are no longer in tune with the times; the world has moved and they have not; their front porches face a backyard; they have become religiously isolated by the side of the old roads while the new and fresh and swift traffic moves on past and beyond them."

Just so. The sources of belief are many. And there are many old sources which have become dried up; there are

many people who still think they can be nourished by them. Indeed, many of life's delusions still perform in spite of deluding. But so far as being vital and significant and prophetic for the new day, the older sources fail to function —they are too far removed from the new highway. Let this figure carry on as we consider what men believe by.

Among Christians it has long been said that the one source of valid religious beliefs lies in the Bible. Take your Bible and read and you will believe what you ought to believe. This was the teaching of the fathers of yesterday, and it is still repeated in many places. Would that it were as easy as this today! To those whose minds dwell along the old roads the authority of tradition still carries weight; but for those who have been caught up in the new traffic where currents of changing thought have been moving swiftly in late years, such an injunction is more pious than it is convincing. The Bible, however exalted, is but one among many sources. If the Scriptures are to carry weight and convince a new generation they will be supported by reasons as different from that of the fathers as the old road itself is unlike the new concrete highway. Let us see this more closely.

The Bible has long been known as a collection of books, but it has been treated as a one-volume affair. People quote from it as if they were quoting from one author or from one age or from one circumstance. The very binding of it in leather with edges of gold, with chiseled-out verses and double columns—unlike ordinary publications—together with a theory, too long unquestioned, of closed inspiration, have tended to make the book gather about itself a uniqueness not unlike the mystery, hallowed by Mormons, of the golden plates delivered by the Angel Moroni to Joseph Smith. "Thus saith the Lord" has been read into its every passage. Men who would come to glory must believe this to be so.

Here is a book that is altogether unlike any other. Its authors were supernaturally motivated to reveal the will of God. To ask critical questions is sacrilege.

There are some people who carry their Bibles under their arm on their way to work as if this would keep them from bad luck. There are those who have it on their parlor table in an expensive edition as a magic wand to bless their hearth. There are ardent believers who open it at any place and proclaim the words as messages from beyond the veil. There is a case on record of a soldier who wore a copy of it under his khaki shirt to protect him from the bullets of "God's enemies." This man was literally shot in his Bible and saved from death—and became a missionary! Fetishism and magic belong not alone to far distant countries or to primitive ages. One sees evidences of such superstitions in almost any hamlet.

I remember an occasion when some ministers sat as guests in a parsonage-home around the breakfast table. The hostess was a minister's wife who was notoriously known as headmaster *par excellence* in the family. She and her husband had been conscientiously reading the Bible for morning devotions in consecutive fashion "from cover to cover." One of the visitors was asked to lead morning devotions and was handed the book. As a courtesy, he asked if there was a special passage to be read since there was a book-mark. "Please read God's Word where we left off," said the hostess. And so he did. It was concerning women being subject to their husbands. It enjoined women to keep silent or present their inquiries to the head of the house. How to bring all this into a devotional air in the face of the circumstances was a load too heavy to bear. In the wisdom of what must have been the Spirit (and to the relief of the guests and hostess) the reader suggested that they dispense with any com-

ments and together repeat the Lord's Prayer! Even the most orthodox must admit that there are spots in the sacred Scriptures which are cold and arid in their devotional value, emphasizing the temporary and provincial rather than the eternal.

It is now clear that the Bible is a collection of miscellaneous letters, essays, poems, legends, and avowedly historical writing. Nevertheless, this literature commands reverence as a source of religious insight and value. But the Bible of today is not the Bible of yesterday. We see it not in terms of a kind of traditional idolatry, but in terms of what it actually is—a literature of separate contents, each book after its own kind, layers of developing thought and culture. We can no longer say "the Bible says." We say: "Paul said," or "the author of the Fourth Gospel has it." We shrink from proclaiming "God says" upon each and every passage although there are utterances and records which may have a meaning deeper to us than the casual word of man.

We now have abridged editions and modern translations, and they are exceedingly helpful. We are not at all disturbed when we hear the minister, as I did a few years ago in a Protestant church of an orthodox tradition, read the first part of the 137th Psalm at a formal Sunday service and abruptly terminate the reading by the solemn remark: "The rest of the chapter is not fit to be read in a Christian church." The only difference between such a statement and the silence of our forefathers upon such passages is the difference between frankness and obfuscation.

How may the collection of biblical books become a source of believing? The answer: It is like any other source. There is nothing magical or miraculous about it. One reads of the heroes of faith of yesterday and one may be inspired by their example to higher living and perhaps to a more profound

faith; one reads of the generations gone and one is made to feel his kinship with other sons of men and with other civilizations— though time and culture and distance separate us from them. One may see in the struggles of the past and the victories won, the finger of a Higher Power directing toward whatever ends. One sees in the biblical records a marked evolution of wisdom culminating in the many incomparable insights of a One whom a large portion of the children of men have gladly called "Son of God." One sees in humanity much that is human and bad; but one also sees in humanity much that is stamped with the watermark of divinity.

But to have real help toward wholesome beliefs one must have the assurance of frankness and honesty and sweet reasonableness. The newer knowledge of the Bible, as so many have testified, has not taken away the faith in those things contained in it which seem good and true and even divine; rather, it has strengthened that faith and made it of tougher fiber. Our beliefs may still find their source of inspiration in the recorded events and utterances of those written legacies considered by tradition to have been divinely inspired; but that they are of divine inspiration is a conclusion of and not a condition to reasonable beliefs. The Bible with its front porch facing the highway of modern knowledge is a truer Bible and by so much a more significant source of faith than the Bible which many are still trying to maintain with its face set toward the old roads of mere traditional allegiance, dogmatic and blind reverence. Recognized now as a much more human book, it becomes much more divine and its real divinity, if at all, will be seen only as the currents of modern critical investigation and enlightened reflection wash from it the impossible driftwood of ignorance and superstition which the centuries have heaped upon it.

The biblical books in the light of our more recent under-

standing of them provide a stimulating source of belief that will continue to be, for many, unmatchable. For those of the Christian faith it will continue to be the chief source since here are contained the historical records which lie at the basis of a long tradition and history calling itself "Christian."

For those who are still unacquainted with this source as seen under the light of the new knowledge, there are many helps. Some specific recommendations are here offered. Take *The Short Bible* (1933) by J. M. P. Smith and E. J. Goodspeed, and read it through consecutively. Here the books are arranged chronologically, in the order (according to present-day scholarship) of their appearance. Here they are in modern translation. Here they are introduced by a short account giving the background and setting. Here are omitted those tiresome and laborious passages which have little or no religious or ethical significance. Such a book displacing the unabridged Gideon Bibles in the modern hotel-rooms would do more for the cause of appreciation and understanding of the Scriptures than most of the pamphlets and defenses put together. And if one wants more specific help in seeing the Book facing the new highway, let him read Dr. H. E. Fosdick's *The Modern Use of the Bible,* and Dr. E. J. Goodspeed's recent popular publications: *New Chapters in New Testament Study* (1937) and *Christianity Goes to Press* (1940). For the whole Bible, H. L. Willett's readable volume *The Bible Through the Centuries* (1929) is an excellent help.*

After reading such book-helps one gains a refreshing perspective; the Bible becomes as interesting and thrilling an

* For the advanced reader: *The Literature of the Old Testament in Its Historical Development* (1922) by J. A. Bewer; *The Literature of the New Testament* (1933) by E. F. Scott.

adventure in reading as one can find anywhere in the whole range of literature.

Religious books and pamphlets offer another source of belief. But it is a source in which there are both wheat and chaff. It is a hard saying, but the truth is that much of the chaff emanates from and under the supervision of Christian churches. Tons of religious pamphlets, books and magazines, no better than dime novels or quack remedies, pour into homes of the unsuspecting faithful, not worth the postage charged for them. Their authors may be sincere but they are ambassadors of pious deception rather than emissaries of truth. Ignorance, superstition, bigotry, dogmatism, hypocrisy, have always been the life-destroying disease germs hovering about religious food; indeed, there are many who seem to thrive in spite of tainted dishes. Cheaply written commentaries on the Bible, but expensively priced, have been dumped by the car-load upon the American public; series of poorly prepared Sunday school lesson-leaves and devotional literature of doubtful value continue to come from ecclesiastical publishing houses. Propaganda sheets pour through the mails each day advertising erratic ideas fashioned in some brain with a religious twist and the innocent victims are beguiled into believing what some day must, in the light of truth, be thoroughly shaken off. One of the wonders of the world is that there is any faith left in mankind after man's inhumanity to man in matters of religion.

"But," you say, "there are people who are helped in this way." Very true. They are helped. A man may believe in the untruth and feel good. A falsehood works, sometimes, up to a very high point. It has always been that way. There are people at a cultural level in which truth is not a matter of major concern; they follow their passing feelings and that is sufficient for them. But such people dwell along the roads

which are destined to become abandoned. Many religious folks are like those of "Tobacco Road," far from the highway of progress. Their religious illiteracy and childishness are not objects of comedy or of scorn; they are the kind that create a Broadway drama of pathos and pity. Thousands upon thousands of people in this country and the world over are nourishing their religious faith in the most lamentable squalor of untruth and ignorance; thousands upon thousands of these same people are rated in other respects as normal, healthy-minded, progressive and respectable in a "progressive" age. Itinerant religious barkers and cheap religious yellow sheets continue to hold them in bondage; they are made to feel good and secure in their religious ignorance.

Not so is the case of those, who, for intellectual conscience's sake, have left their traditional religious households. The old faith will no longer do. They are ready and anxious to construct a temple of beliefs if only they knew how. Only of this are they certain: their house of faith must be set along the main highways if it is to be for them a dwelling. For them we have a special word.

At any fair-sized public library today are found repositories of literature which will breed beliefs that will help along these modern highways. But, one will ask, how may one find such literature? A well-trained librarian will be able to give directions. Most librarians are now required to take special work in just such matters; and that is the very function of the modern public library: to help men and women and children to find for themselves dependable guides in the ways of truth, of wholesome entertainment, and the kind of literature that stimulates towards higher living. Reputable publishing houses through their disciplined and experienced editors and advisers have, in recent years, put

out some highly useful books on religious subjects written for the average person, books which are genuine aids to reconstructed beliefs. There are a few religious magazines (alas too few!) which are helpful; and they contain announcements and reviews of just such books. There is a religious book club which has as one of its editorial aims the dissemination of just such helps.

Not all such books, however, carry the word "religion" or "philosophy" in their titles.

A young friend of mine who preaches in the heart of New York City to what may be called middle-class sophisticated audiences tells me that his sermon-themes are never formulated in the conventional religious vocabulary; yet they revolve about matters which lie close to the religion of everyday living. "If I announce I shall preach on 'Overcoming Fear' or on 'Climbing the Next Step Higher,' " he said, "I shall have a church full of eager and hungry souls. And I do not preach mere 'success' sermons, nor do I talk milk-and-water-ethics. I preach on themes as old as Amos and Jeremiah and as fresh as those of Paul at Athens."

Many people shy when they hear the word "religion." They want none of that. Religion for them is synonymous with the old road. They will come to hear an exhortation on "Overcoming Fear" and pass by on the other side when the bulletin board announces "The Sin of Adam." Who cares about Adam's sin? Well, who cares? The old religion of faith and promise and hope dressed in the ideas and words which are contemporary and vital—that is what they hunger for. This has always been so. Our religious beliefs will find their source not necessarily in places or in books or in themes which wear conventional labels; they will find their springs in unsuspected places, in words rated as secular rather than sacred, and in themes which are everywhere and always in-

tensely human. People are as religious today as they ever were; but their religious needs and expressions must find expression in terms of the environing culture. We shall have a section on this at a later point.

Between my summer home and that of my neighbor, nature provided a number of tall trees which seemed to form a line dividing one property from another. It is not a line but a kind of suggestion that here is a natural parting of east from west. It is crooked and uneven. Nature nowhere sketches hard and fast geometrical boundaries. A few years ago, when there was a series of real-estate transfers, surveyors were sent to our section to mark on the ground with driven iron posts the exact spots which legally separated one place from the other.

My neighbor and I were both surprised to find that our properties did not extend where we had thought. The trees did not form the boundary line at all. Some were found, according to the re-surveyed plat, to belong to me, others to him, and some were half on his side and half on mine. For years he had been mowing grass around his house, and it appeared that he really owned a beautiful lawn. But to his chagrin and to my surprise the surveyor's line showed that I owned much of the bordering part of his lawn and even some of the ground upon which he had erected his garage. Posts were placed to show where the legal dividing line lay; these posts and this line cut right across what seemed to be Nature's own suggestion of division. The legal survey looked artificial and, with the newly set cedar posts, it still looks wrong.

On the other side of my property the situation became still more perplexing. The re-survey showed that my other neighbor's kitchen was built inches from my property-line and his own ash and garbage dump lay piled in my back woods. For

a time there was much confusion, for rearrangements had to be made to conform with legal standards. It will be nigh impossible for the natural surroundings to harmonize with these plotted lines unless one lays the axe to the roots of some of the few revered and ancient pines and maples that remain of the virgin forest and begin the long process of replanting.

There is a homily in all this which I cannot forbear to express in these pages, a lesson which haunts me every time I walk around the place. The lines men set up dividing this from that are terribly artificial. There are no such lines in the great out-of-doors. Nature is all of one piece and fabric. She knows not of the boundaries set up by minds chiseled to artificial markers. Her rivers and lakes respect no such limits; neither her trees, nor game, nor sky, nor air, nor snow, nor sun, nor rain, nor wind, nor flood. It is all one house, one yard, one place. Men continue to mark this from that; but their sign-posts are marks which in due time Nature will wear away and replace by vegetation respecting no lines. Men's classifications are conveniences not recorded in rugged reality itself. In the words of our fathers: men's ways are not God's.

It is so when we consider the sources of our beliefs. Many people still believe that there is but one source: the line which they have set up around their traditions and prejudices. Outside of these lines there are no springs. Jews and Christians read from their sacred books and ignore the rest; Mohammedans read from the *Q'uran* and that is for them the one book of truth; one sect has this enclosed circle and another that, each after its own kind.

A few years ago it would have been considered blasphemy if, in some Christian church, passages from the sacred books of the East or from some non-canonical prose writer or poet

were read from the pulpit. The lines forbid such public reading. Religious truth is claimed to be bounded; the bad, or at least the not-good, lies outside. Indeed, how great has not the error of man been all through his religious history in this very matter! Some churches still forbid other voices than their own to be heard by their assembled congregations. My own traditional church (a large Protestant body) has only recently reaffirmed its generation-old position of prohibiting other than its own ministers to preach from its pulpits! Some churches will have nothing to do with the newer insights of reverent scholarship since they impinge upon marked boundaries. The record is full of ecclesiastical curses upon the innovations which come with the discoveries of the new day, upon the newer revelations in the natural sciences, upon new truths and interpretations. Even reed organs and lyrics other than the Psalms have been regarded as irreverent by a self-enclosed body of saints.

To return to the original figure, the new concrete pavements of thought and experience, however, cut right across the old roads and properties. They, the old, are condemned by law wherever people remain recalcitrant. Some day the new highway itself will be old and superceded by another. There are still more unsuspected sources of insight and vision along the way—which each generation must experience and find for itself.

The religious literature of all ages is coming more and more to be appreciated in the new day. The lesson of old, which is Nature's own lesson, is becoming more real and significant: God hath spoken in divers times and places. He hath nowhere left himself without a witness. "I perceive," says Paul in the same mood, "that ye men of Athens are very religious." Even the passage "Every Scripture is inspired" may here be faithfully quoted.

The recognition of such diverse sources does not equate them. By no means. There are springs with more and clearer water; there are hills which are higher; there are parcels of ground which are more fertile. Even Jesus himself crossed the lines which separated officious Judaeans from Samaritans to seek among the cursed unorthodox and "unbelievers" the touch of a more humane friendship. Who would affirm that even those across the waters of the Jordan or in the northern outpost of Capernaum were for him less a source of inspiration than the sacred streets of Jerusalem? In the valley out under the sky he found God and himself when the temple-throngs and parades crowded out the Spirit.

We return then to the first pages of this chapter. The eminent American preacher was right, profoundly right, when he said that the sources of sermons are all around us. We are not here interested in preachers as such. We only affirm that it is the same with our beliefs. The labels we wear do separate us artificially as the civil law separates one parcel of ground from another underneath us. Such labels, however, do not have their counterpart in the turf of reality. Men's hearts beat the same everywhere; they have the same fundamental needs; and their beliefs are motivated by the same nature which has produced all of them. As members of the same habitat and sons under the same sky we have much to learn each from the other; the sources cut across all lines, nationalities, ages, and cultures.

Probably, when all is said and done, the basic sources of our beliefs come by way of our own personal experience. Experience may be defined as anything that happens to us. As such there are experiences of all kinds. Contacts with our inherited culture is one large underlying experience and the basis here is tradition and custom. Many, if not most, of our beliefs are formed from this source. Authority has always in

some form been strong. Our developing likes and dislikes form another layer of experience. We believe what we want to. We disbelieve what we dislike. Some name becomes revered; and we follow the beliefs of our hero. There is hero-worship in tradition molding our tastes, heroes comparable to those in Horatio Alger novels. The Lutherans like to quote Luther; the Methodists revere their Wesleys. Every week thousands of Christian Scientists listen in rapt attention to their readers quoting from Mrs. Eddy; millions now living "who will never die" have listened to the words of Judge Rutherford; the names of Joseph Smith or Brigham Young are revered by the faithful among the Latter-Day Saints.

And yet—of all experiences which nourish our beliefs none is so vital and fundamental to us as the experience of some tragedy or stirring event. It may be sickness, or the death of some one who is much the very fiber of us, bad fortune in the market place, pain, trouble of any sort. The essence of such experiences is that they are frustrating; they interrupt the usual; our habits become disarranged; we no longer can do the things we were doing and if we take them up again we cannot do them quite in the same way. We are different. Our court of appeal is not now tradition, however hallowed, or some authority however revered, or mere likes and dislikes, or the inbred custom of things. We have to meet the new with the new, not simply with the rubber-stamp of the old. We are put on our own. We have to go through the turnstile all alone. Our pains are not fully shareable. They are intensely personal and private. We feel a first-hand ownership in tragedy about which words from others are hollow. The presence of others in silence is the only understanding that others can share.

Here, indeed, are the basic sources of those beliefs which will become genuinely a part of us. There is no teacher like

the bitter pill. Being burned is a deeper lesson than an essay on fire. If one will go through the life-histories of the greater "heroes of faith," one will find that they have skeletons locked in their closets, that their fingers have been scorched in some misfortune, that they have suffered pains very real and intense. Such experiences should, it would seem, make of them and of us disbelievers rather than believers. Indeed, misfortune has destroyed temples of belief. But by far, the large part of mankind, fools as they may seem, come out with some positive faith and with one burning with a greater heat. Why is this so?

The answer to this question holds, I believe, the secret of genuine believing. In our tough experiences we are moved on toward a new plane of dimension. We no longer stand at the blackboard attempting to solve life's baffling equations by abstraction. We now move into the dimension of the concrete. We now make assertions under the compulsion of a newer understanding. We say, "There must be a life eternal;" "There must be a God who will bring victory out of defeat;" "There must be justice somewhere;" "There must be, somewhere, somehow, a significant meaning to life." We become pledged to the logic of *must.* This is the subtle truth which the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant saw when, in spite of his questionable agnosticism, he announced his great positive manifesto: that the moral will is the ground of all genuine beliefs. Or, to translate him in our own thought: we have entered into a world different from that of tradition, custom, preferences, authorities. It is a world which possesses its own prerogatives, speaks its own language, makes demands upon our understanding. Job put it strongly, perhaps too strongly: "Though he slay me yet will I trust him." Tertullian in a fitful mood crazily declared: I believe . . . "it is certain because it is impossible."

Man may appear the fool for grounding some of his beliefs on the logic of must, but it may be that there is wisdom in this apparent folly. At any rate, the world keeps on producing just such experiences with just such sort of reactions, in lands and climes and ages everywhere. Man may stumble dangerously near the pit of despair but there is something in the shadows within him which keeps him from going completely over. Were it not so, man's tenacious optimism, his smile in the midst of tears, would have long ago been acknowledged as the sure sign of his insanity.

Some of us who have lived along the old roads and have moved over to the new highways have moved not because we desired the thrill of the new, or that we wanted to become adventurous prodigals. Our bitter experiences, unsought, have brought us to where we are. We have found that things have happened to our minds. Tradition and authority, however glamorous, no longer could minister with their unquestioned service. We had to make a break with the past, not all of it, and in terms of some major operations. We have come to our present beliefs through the valley of the shadow of intense doubt. Some of us have not left that valley; some of us are slowly but surely climbing again the hill, a new hill; some of us are already up on top building a new home on some more favorable site. It is not easy to have doubts. Doubts are pains. But they have their reward in a viewpoint which is more real because, like pain, it is more personal.

There is this comfort in the tragic sources of believing: alone though we seem to be in our private experiences we learn that others whom we had hardly suspected have had their troubles. There is solace in the thought that a fraternity exists of such souls—each one having been initiated privately into something that bids to be greater.

Always, has there been this process of re-building, of making a new home along some newer highway. This is of the essence of life which moves and flows on and on. We no longer cast envious glances at the by-roads of yesterday but rejoice in feeling the thrill of travelling along with the pulsating current of life itself.

CHAPTER IV

Believing What?

So FAR WE HAVE BEEN considering believing in the most general terms. We have not even attempted a definition. Many readers may think of believing as an attitude of deliberate affirmation toward certain matters which are beyond demonstration. Some will think of believing as a frame of mind involving trust and dependence akin more to the feelings than to reason and action. The Roman Catholic attitude toward believing is that it is an act of the will, a laying hold on that which cannot be laid hold on in any other way. It is a resolution, taking a stand for something without waiting for evidence. To believe, says the Catholic (and some Protestants) is deliberately to take a position, the work of the free will, and having taken that position to follow it with the same resolution, the whole act involving not only anticipation of but the realization of fruits therefrom. Early Protestant Reformers, particularly Martin Luther, took the other interpretation. To believe, they said, is to trust, to have confidence, to lean, to cling, to submit, to let worry ride the winds. The one stresses "I will"; the second, "I surrender."

Many of us remember Émile Coué's popular book on autosuggestion of nearly two decades ago. The principle of reversed effort enunciated by him was a simple one: "when the will and the imagination are in conflict, the imagination always wins." What you imagine will take you farther along

than what you deliberately determine. When you go to bed at night and you are reflecting upon the possibility of achieving a certain purpose which you know to be difficult of attainment, do not say to yourself, "I will, I will, by the gods, I will do so and so." Rather, you should envisage yourself as having already succeeded and in that frame of mind drop into sleep. By successive imprints of the imagination of success you will find yourself already becoming the master of your fears and tapping resources for your eventual success. Coué would seem to favor the early Protestant meaning of believing, of confidence, as a sounder principle of human psychology.

Now we need not here go into the wherewithal of Coué's theory. Both ideas of believing have sound psychological bases. They are complementary. Both the will and the imagination are factors necessary in this business of believing, the one more so at one time and the other at another. William James in many of his psychological writings gave emphasis to the will, giving title to one of his most famous essays, "The Will to Believe."

Whatever the psychology involved, whether the emphasis at a given time involves a deliberate and resolute stand or whether the imagination has time to lay hold of that which is intently desired—the chief burden of the whole business of believing is more than its psychology. It is rather, the *object* of belief, the end-result. Surely there is no virtue in mere believing. Indeed, about everything under the sun, from man to superman, from fact to myth, has been believed. In religious matters the *what* of belief is the more fundamental question. There is no scarcity in believing attitudes—witness the multitude of followers of cults and *isms*. Mere believing is dangerous. Laying hold of something which matters supremely, something that has significance beyond the here and now, is

the essence of the religious spirit. But—*what* is worthy of such believing? *What* deserves such devotion?

Intelligence is man's only safeguard against fool-hardy beliefs. As said earlier, there are many who are fearfully afraid of man's intelligence. The reason for this is clear, in many cases. If permitted to enter the sphere of the faith of some people, intelligence is apt to take from them that which they think they must continue to hold. Such people curse intelligence—as a less worthy gift of the gods than is sheer faith. With fear in their hearts such people call their brethren who honor intelligence by such a word of anathema as "rationalists." But to cry against intelligence is ultimately to destroy faith itself, by the encouragement of ignorance, dogmatism and fanaticism.

I should like to take an illustration from a contemporary scene—indeed, the woods are full of illustrations—of this business of believing where the *object* of believing is notoriously unworthy of such devotion and unsound because intelligence is lacking—an illustration, nevertheless, of a religious phenomenon in all its vigor and power of belief. I take this illustration for two reasons: first, I have witnessed the unbelievable phenomenon with my own eyes, and, secondly, it is a case where an extreme expression reveals clearly the power of religious belief, the content of which is without rhyme or reason. "We believe, we believe," these people seem to say. But ask them "Believe *what*?" and they have an answer that is incredibly inane.

I set down here unchanged the account which I wrote soon after a most unbelievable experience. I was witness to a religious spectacle in the heart of America's largest metropolitan center, a spectacle so primitive that one might have thought that time had been miraculously turned back to the very beginnings of human history. I give it as it was

then written, under the spell of a most intense impression.

* * * *

"It is a Saturday night. The occasion is the 'love feast' of the Father Divine cult in the heart of New York's Harlem. Hundreds are gathered on the third floor of the main 'heaven', looking intently upon a medium-sized negro—who accepts from his followers the title of God—as he presides at the table around which sit the 'disciples.'

". . . I have stood within ten feet of god. I have witnessed with my own eyes the frenzy of worship before a living incarnation. I have watched deity eat chicken and mashed potatoes and pick his teeth with a wooden toothpick. I have been present at a heavenly *agape,* literally the lord's supper, with the lord father pouring tea and consecrating every spoon that went into the covered dish. I saw both the Marthas and the Marys, some serving the supper and the others on the dirty floor with legs crunched beneath them looking up to catch a mere glance from the sacred eyes. Old women, fat and smelly matrons with perspiration dripping into their open mouths, a few children, tired old men, young men with feet itching to tap-dance to the music,—all were there. A Caucasian, with a book-keeper's face, had stood at St. Peter's microphone and announced the imminent presence of the divine.

". . . We had been waiting for him since before ten p. m. How long the crowds had gathered I do not know. They were singing their monotonous though rhythmic tunes downstairs in the auditorium, pausing for rest now and then to hear testimonials and the shoutings of 'Thank you, Father, O thank you, Father', when we came in. Some slept between

the outbursts. White were mixed with the profusion of colored. One woman dancing with craze wrenched the trombone from the heavenly three-piece orchestra and wrecked it probably forever. I, too, never want to hear another trombone. The only hymn-melody I recognized was 'The Music Goes 'Round and 'Round.' It was most appropriate, for this is one song that has no ending.

". . . At twenty minutes to one, Father entered. I was lucky to see him as he does not always awaken that early from his naps. He wore a business suit over his small rotundish body. I watched his every move. He kept his poise amidst the din of shouting; when the hymns of praise were dying down, he nodded his head in two-four time in the direction of the orchestra as if to say: 'Keep it up boys, you mustn't fail me, for I have no speech tonight.' When a crazed woman threw her shawl around his head and danced with exotic emotion, he merely parted his lips in a smile. When a young girl cried out to her frenzied mother, 'Mamma, Mamma,' he didn't even turn his head to look around.

". . . I have never seen such passing of the food from hands across the table. One has to learn the art of how to get it to the face while keeping it going 'round and 'round: a technique which must have taken many a meal to learn. All of a sudden, as becomes the special prerogative of deity, Father arose and addressed the throng. The only thing I got out of his text (lasting scarcely three minutes) was this: 'Buildings must have both mortar and bricks, that is, buildings with mortar and bricks. Now, the bricks need the mortar, and (long rhetorical pause) the mortar needs the bricks!' He sat down. 'Thank you, Father, thank you, Father,' shrieked both men and women.

". . . At two a. m. my body gave way from the four hours in the vertical position. The stench of sweat was unbearable.

Between me and the door was a mass of humanity. I shoved to get my body forward to the door and each time I was shoved in turn to where I had been. I could get nowhere. A colored mamma shouted to me: 'Say, 'Thank you, Father' and you won't have any trouble.' With all the spirit that was within me I shouted 'It is truly wonderful, Father. Peace, Father. Thank you, Father, thank you, Father, and peace, Father.' It worked magic. I saw a path opening up; the black sea was making way for me to pass through, reminding me of the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea. Down three flights in the auditorium was a multitude waiting hungrily for god to come down and begin the service. I have never witnessed such patience. Loud speakers were giving them entertainment from the supper above. A little after two a. m. I was out in the street, passing Father's Rolls Royce, shiny as the blackest of faces I had seen. I was too tired to wait until the real meeting had begun.

". . . Just what the impressions are I have not been able to untangle. I am emotionally upset about it all. I have never witnessed such a scene. Just how my philosophy of religion will be changed I do not know. I know, however, that it is changed. No philosophical argument has affected me more than the night in Harlem. Cross-currents of thought have clouded my mind.

". . . . I shall never say again: what the world needs is religion, or faith, or mere believing. Much of religion, of religious beliefs, must be anathema to a respectable Deity. A thousand times better is the sane irreligious life, honest hundred-per-cent doubts, than much of the religion and religious beliefs which the world has witnessed or is witnessing. Far better no worship or belief at all than mere worship or believing. Men may need a *kind* of religion, certain beliefs, but never, never, just religion, just believing. At this point I

seem to see a flash of light giving just cause for the religious missionary enterprise which, in late years, I must confess, has been dimmed by an almost complete skepticism. That we should sustain the missionaries in their purely humanitarian efforts—agricultural, medical, social and hygienic teachings, and the like—I had not doubted. But I now see something in the cause of propagating a *kind* or *species* of religion itself and of religious belief.

". . . The religious spirit is set in an emotional key. That certainly is true. But such emotionalism in itself without ethical and intellectual content is repulsive, abhorrent. I shall never forget Nora's face (I call the twenty-year-old damsel, who was standing nearby, by that name): eyes rolling 'round and 'round, lips parted in a smile that was sad, with a look that was distant and empty. Her gaze gave the impression of flirtation with a nonexistent zero. She was blind to my watchful eye though she looked right at me. Undoubtedly she was emotionally serene. But the emptiness was appalling. The face of Nora haunts me. I shall never argue again that we need the religious spirit nor merely the trusting attitude. A thousand times more do we need sanity, intellectual sanity!

". . . The whole thing prodded my mind to make excursions into the past. This phenomenon is like the famous Kentucky revival about which I had read and wondered. It is like a good many other contemporary religious meetings which are less intense.

". . . Forgetting, for the moment, the person of Father Divine, consider the crowd itself. My mind could not forbear asking the question: can those Harlem humans be so very different from the first-century crowds which shouted their Hosannas, not realizing at all the drama that was being enacted before them? The looks of those poor people must have been pathetic; their minds must have been as airy and thin;

their bodies must have smelled as badly. They, too, were the poor and the downtrodden. The curious little ones must have climbed up as closely 'to see the show.' They too wanted their miracles. The mothers must have been as tired and worn from their day's toil. The men must have appeared as indolent and naive. They, too, though they did not understand, must have shouted their 'thank you, Father!'

". . . I do not wish to convey the meaning that there is any parallel between Jesus of Nazareth and Father Divine. No sane person can conceive of such a parallel. But the situation offers the parallel. To many of his day, Jesus must have been believed in not for what he was but because of what the crowd thought they could get for themselves. Believing often reflects the believer rather than the belief. People are not only illiterate in their ideas but in their emotions. It is this illiteracy of feeling which suggests the parallel.

". . . The 'Son of Man' spends his time with the nobodys. He assures them of their importance in the eyes of Deity. To many this is a message of vanity. They understand not. He even is bold to proclaim that unless others have something which they possess men cannot enter into his kingdom. To many this gives pride to their lowly state.

". . . It is easy to say to college students who wear clean faces and smell of hair-tonic, who dangle respectable I.Q.'s, that Christianity teaches the infinite worth of human personality. I shall never again find that doctrine easy. Amidst the welter of wretched Harlem souls and the unhallowed followers of the Nazarene, the gospel of the universal look of benignity stretches the imagination to the breaking point. They seem too close to the forest primeval.

". . . No longer shall I wonder why Jesus did not produce a work on systematic theology or a harmonious system of ethics. I now understand the parables. They are myths. I

now understand the prose. It, too, is Oriental. Not that myths are untrue; myths are forms of expression which may carry truth. I shall no longer require of the New Testament record that it be logically bullet-proof. I have seen Harlem and in Harlem I have seen something of the common mind—even (I have dared to suggest) among first-century disciples. I shall no longer worry over the miracles. The miracle of belief in Father Divine is before my eyes. It is enough that these people believe that in a brown-skinned American ex-barber, deity (not symbol, mind you!) can be realized. Men always think in terms of images; and the law of the masses is: the more concrete the image the more real.

". . . The miracle of miracles for me is that the spirit and the teachings of the 'Son of Man' of Galilee were preserved in spite of the frenzy of the mob. I can understand the story of the water turned into wine; but I cannot so easily understand the person whose influence transcends the illiterate emotions of the masses and even the illiterate sophistications of later ages. It is a spirit which will not be grounded by any localization however misappropriated in time or by any culture.

". . . I can now understand why the 'Son of Man' was so afraid of crowds. 'Go and tell no man.' A crowd, however homogeneous, is fraught with danger. In Father Divine's private dining room my eye was ever on the door. I was fearful that anything might happen. For four hours we stood on the brink of tragedy. Just one shout of a four-lettered word (f-i-r-e) would have caused bedlam. (I shall never again despise the wide open spaces and the isolated hamlet.) I shall always from now on carry a more realistic aversion to mass-religion. The crucifixion itself had its setting in crowds. And the crucifixion was the legitimate outcome of illiterate beliefs and illiterate emotions. It is the epitome of unintelligence, emotionalism, social suggestion and irresponsibility.

". . . And another word. I am more than ever a convert to 'rationalism.' I do not mean a rationalism that does away with parable and myth. I know my own feelings too well not to realize that the emotions are a part of the human frame. But I shall eschew the hortatory which shelves reason; and where the choice is to be made between unadulterated religious feeling, without sound beliefs, and a straight Scotch philosophy I shall choose the latter."

* * * *

As stated in the previous chapter there are thousands of "respectable" people today whose religious devotion is given to unprincipled beliefs. The Father Divine cult can be duplicated in essence in almost any community. People are by nature believing creatures. How, otherwise, explain the continuance of so much bally-hoo-advertising over the air and through the press? Men are by nature trusting animals, given the right psychological conditions. All they need is some forceful personality to come along and they will make up a crowd of shouting disciples. Even the greatest of prophets had his crowds; and the record plainly shows that they were a source of worry to him. Men gather as flies about any scheme that has some sweet smelling odor. Their intellects lag; and when their minds catch up to their hearts they disbandon in shame to look for some other source of allegiance.

But, our initial question was: Believing *What?* This, it should now be clear, is a major question. In religious matters certain themes are generally involved in beliefs. We look not only for a believing attitude but for certain beliefs involved in that attitude. In religious beliefs we think of God, of a Power that helps us on, of a life to come, of the meaning of existence, of virtues which carry their special rewards, of

a solution to the enigma of suffering and frustration, of heroes who stand out in pointing to some way of life, of an institution which gathers to itself people of similar minds and attitudes toward the world and destiny.

One of the theses of this book is that religious beliefs reflect cultural levels. We shall always have such phenomena as the Father-Divine cult so long as people are at that cultural level. Education, more and more of it, is the only way in which there can be any semblance of development toward the more valid, the more true type of religious belief. And this education is not specifically religious; it is first of all, through and through, secular. We probably have had enough of the claim that what is needed is religious education, certainly not of the conventional type; much of that has been propaganda for outworn and outmoded formulae of another generation. When general education, soaked with critical intelligence and hallowed by worthy moral ideals, takes its effect, we shall have the background for the other. Not until then.

In the remaining pages of this book we shall consider certain beliefs as an answer to the question of the heading of this chapter: Believing What? We shall assume that we are addressing ourselves to readers who have reached the cultural level which is consonant with the consciousness of the transitions of thought of our time, that is, such people who have been so shocked by such changes that they feel the effects upon their life attitudes. It will be our major thesis that when such people find themselves thus bewildered they will do well to admit, without a sense of shame, that to rebuild they must start from the ground up. As much as they like to hold beliefs validated by a long tradition, they cannot do so without first having gone through the process of sloughing off ideas and beginning at the first rung of the ladder. Probably they shall be believing much more than is suggested

in the following pages; but that "much more" will at least involve as much as is here indicated. Not all of us are where the saints were. But we may walk in their steps in a way suited to our bewildering times.

We shall consider very definitely the matter of what we can believe about religion and, more particularly, about Christianity; the matter of believing in Divinity, as the hub of things; the matter of what we may believe in regard to the church as an institution dealing with things religious; the matter of whether we are creatures of destiny or creators of our own; the matter of frustration and sorrow which touches a significant and cruel part of man's experience; prayer as it affects the heart of religious practice; and, lastly, things to come, or what we may call, man's destiny.

CHAPTER V

What Can We Believe about Religion?

FEW WORDS in our everyday vocabulary get as much abuse and misuse as that blessed word "religion." We listen to the casual conversations in some hotel lounge or on some street corner and the word means this to one person and that to another. Even clergymen are not always clear in this matter.

Many people simply cannot divorce this word from their own particular religious faith or their church. Christianity indeed is a religion but it is only one among many. Religion and Christianity are not completely interchangeable terms. Not all trees are hemlocks although all hemlocks are trees. Not all religion is Methodism but Methodism is a religion. When, therefore, we ask "What is religion?" we are asking a question not about the one particular religion one happens to know best, but we are inquiring about religion everywhere no matter what the expression.

There are those who think of religion as a synonym for the church. But this is evidently so narrow as to need no comment. The word "church" itself certainly has to be distinguished from the one I happen to know best, for there are churches and churches of all kinds and degrees. A given religion may not be expressed in or through a church.

Some think of religion as a relation on the part of man to God. This may or may not be true to fact. It depends upon what we mean by "God." In a later chapter we shall show that the term God is very ambiguous and needs special con-

sideration. As the discussion moves on, it should be plain why we cannot begin our consideration of religion with the apparently simple belief in Deity. The conception of God has assumed a variety of forms and expressions all the way through religious history.

A good many people think of religion as being the same as good ethics. "My religion is trying to be a good Elk" may be one of the thousands of varieties of such expressions. Perhaps that is a religion. But perhaps it is not. If it means that I try to be a good neighbor and the like, it means that I am interested only in morals.

Of course, it all depends upon a definition. If we ask, "What can we believe about religion?", the answer will depend upon our meaning of that term. In this chapter we shall try to provide a satisfactory answer. With that question settled, our beliefs about it must follow. The definition—any definition for that matter—furnishes the trump card in this whole matter of religious beliefs.

Let us begin with a very frank remark. "Religion" has been terribly over-rated. Probably this more than anything else is at the root of so much skepticism about it today. It is something like the situation at a college with which I once had an acquaintance. Announcements were made in chapel about a very good speaker or an especially attractive entertainment or musical event to be given on the next Tuesday night at 8 p.m. It was announced as the event of the year. No one could afford to miss it. The price of the tickets was set at such a low figure that the entertainment was available to all. We bought our tickets—and we sat bored through another evening. Fooled again! Over-rated announcements mean only one thing: a lie. When, once in a great while, a good number did come off, we were not there simply because we no longer believed the believable.

"Religion" is said to make one a much better person. It "gives" something no one can afford to miss. It is the hope of the race, the basis of civilization and of all progress. Without it we are doomed. Now, any student of history knows that such sweeping statements are so sweeping as to cover up whatever grain of truth they may contain. Religion throughout the past has been associated with all sorts of evil: with human slavery, with oppression, with war, with sexual vice, with selfishness and personal aggrandizement, with subjection of women and children, with tyranny—in fact with everything human. The hope of humanity does not lie in the promulgation of religion; rather, it lies with the supplanting and extinction of many forms of it. To say that the world needs more religion is not only ambiguous but positively untrue. A good ethical life is of much more value to the individual and the race than many forms of religion. Our previous discussion of the Father Divine cult should have made this clear.

What is implied by the question then is an understanding of terms. In this writer's mind certain distinctions are drawn which seem reasonable and necessary. There is a world of difference, in his way of thinking, between *being religious* and having a religion. For him there is no such thing as religion-in-general but only religion in particular.* One may have a religion without *being religious.* One may go to church and not be religious; one may be religious and not go to church. One may believe in a God, in the Westminster Confession, say mass, contribute to the synagogue, without being religious. One may have his own private little religion which would be unrecognized by anyone else.

Let us go to the root of the matter by looking a little closer at the term "being religious."

* See the author's *First Chapters in Religious Philosophy* (1937), Chapters I–III.

Suppose we draw some concentric circles, a small circle inside a larger, and this, in turn, inside a still larger, and so on. Suppose we mark the smallest circle with the statement: *Some things matter to me.* Here is *a very minimum* statement, a basic fundamental, characteristic of a person's *being religious.* For a really religious person, always there is something that matters to him. Certain things, of whatever kind, matter to us. They make a difference to us. Without an understanding of our concern over them, people fail to understand us. What concerns some people does not concern others. It may be we want to graduate from college, to be a first-class aviator, a good necktie salesman, a good yodelist. Of course, there may be a number of concerns: our fiancé as well as our football team. We are creatures with concerns of whatever the number or kind.

Next, we draw a circle around this one. Inside this second circle we set down the statement: *What matters most to me.* This may be of whatever kind. Our wants are not co-equal. We want some things more than others. I may want to succeed in my ambitions more than I want fried chicken today. I will even give up fried chicken so that I may pay on the bursar's account and stay in school. My graduation means more to me than my present taste for chicken. It may be that I shall choose the latter in preference to the former. But I learn to curb my desires to the one which is more than a passing interest. If not, I change my scale of values. The point here is that we all want some things *more* than others. The fact that we change our greatest desires does not concern us. *When one is religious one is concerned about some things more than others.* One has singled out that which for him means more and most. In this respect the religious spirit is grounded in normal human desires, belonging on the "preferred list."

Now, we draw another circle about this one. Inside it we set down the statement: *Some things,* I find, *ought to matter most for me in the long run of things.* Our elders tell us what *ought* to matter most. Or we may learn in Sunday-school what ought to matter most. But a mere recognition of things we rate as the most valuable for us in the long run does not make us religious. We must *feel* that certain things are most significant in the long run.

Indeed, we change our perspective as time goes on and experience deepens. Our scale of values expands and changes with the give and take of life. But what is important here is that we get the feeling about certain things (of whatever degree or kind) which *ought* to be held above everything else. These things matter, become serious; they are compelling; they make a difference. They change us. They make us stand out from others. Such things may be the pursuit of good health, of wisdom, of sound ethical conduct. We feel that not only do some things matter more than others but that some things *ought* to matter more. We are, by nature, evaluating creatures. We do not look passively upon experience but we look with taste or distaste, likes or dislikes, values or disvalues. Our judgments are of worth; and of our many worths some are more worthy. *To be religious,* thus, involves being concerned not only about something and not only about something more than something else but about something which we feel ought to be for us more worthy than anything else.

One more circle is involved in this exposition. Inside the next larger circle we set down the statement: *Among the things which concern me, the things which ought to be valued in the long run, there are some which I feel affect my destiny.* Let us call this maximum of value for us "the ulterior." Now, it is clear, that what is ulterior for one will not be ulterior

for another. Some people may say that the Golden Age of Tomorrow, the Social Utopia, is the ulterior value. Some may say it is God. Some may call it Fate or Kismet. Some may, more modestly, call it the Good Life in a Better World of the Here and Now. It makes no difference to the characteristic religious spirit *what* it is called. There is something that is recognized as of more than passing concern, of something that reaches out beyond the confines of our backyards; whatever it is called, it is part of the religious response.

There are some people who may treat their business in a way which would apparently put them in this circle. Their business matters a great deal and ought to matter for them for they have a family to support. But it is doubtful that they would be willing to say that their business or profession is of the kind that is of *ulterior* concern. Life holds out for them so many shadows, so many uncertainties, so much wind and weather; the horizons are always so far away; the hinterland is always haunting; death stalks around the corner and the curtain conceals the mystery of so much that lies beyond. All things considered, there is for the most hard-headed business man a realm which, at times at least, may matter more than anything else—more than even his business. It is this something *more* that is a part of the religious spirit. In this world we shall never get rid of mystery and lengthening shadows. And it is mystery, our sense of finiteness together with our recognition and feeling of the hinterlands about us that makes us "incurably religious."

To be religious, then, is to be concerned about something (circle one), about something more than something else (circle two), about something which we find and feel ought in the long run to matter more than anything else (circle three), and that that something has to do with our destiny and our place in the larger framework of what is for

us our Universe (circle four). It is not a matter of mere belief or of action or of mere feeling. It is feeling but it is feeling coupled with the recognition of ulterior value.

It is, accordingly, the most natural thing in the world for human beings to be religious. Not that it is natural that we are religious to the same degree as others or to the same degree throughout our lives. The older we get, the more, perhaps, will the reality of the ulterior cast its shadow over that which was for us more immediate. It is only natural that young people in the glow and enthusiasm of good health and ambition, with their blood flowing spiritedly through their system, fresh and spontaneous, will fail to lay hold of what is considered the more ulterior by those older. The years will bring perspective and the deepening of insights into the value of values. The young, nevertheless, soon learn that there are gradations of worth all the way from the bottomless pit to the starry sky. They may be *near-religious* as they are building their first three circles; they will be fully so when for them there is the realization in personal appreciation of those values which are felt to reach out beyond the here and now toward the stars or into the everlasting tomorrows (fourth circle).

Everybody is potentially religious. We get snatches of the spirit when sometimes we least expect it: in a love affair, on hearing the "Rhapsody in Blue," by means of the mellow strains of the cello, or through the radiant testimony of a simple soul.*

"To have a religion," we go on now to say, is to ally oneself with those *expressions* of deed and word which have some reference to the religious spirit. We learn about a given religion. We may or we may not get religious. *A religion is a*

* Consult the Diagram which gives a pictorial summary of what we have been saying thus far. Figure I, page 74.

body of beliefs and practices. It is a religion in so far as it has some reference (actual or potential) to the religious spirit of concern. We may never get this spirit through the strait-jacket traditional forms of a given religion. We may have to construct our own out of the materials of our own experience. That is what every age does wherever there is a vital religion. "Christianity" has changed garments all through the centuries and it is fast changing its dress in our own. Our real and vital religion consists, then, in those *bodies of meanings* which have for us, at some time or other, a felt concern. They are the expression of the things that matter in terms of life's widest horizons.*

Now it is a fact of human history that people have been religious and at the same time devils. The fault is not with their being religious but with their religion. It is *that which* mattered most to them, *that which* they felt *ought* to matter the most, envisaged as the ulterior, which has made them devils or saints. Thus the motive power, the dynamic of their intense religious devotion and feeling, was attached to an unfortunate body of ideas and practices. A religion may take on such self-defenses as: the word of the Lord has been given us; we have seen visions; we are God's anointed; we have a divine mission; we are God's elect and chosen of Him. But by their fruits they are known. A religion may misdirect religious feeling; a religious feeling may ally itself with a bad religion. The mass of people can be stimulated easily into religious feeling; and a bad religion can be the stimulation or the outcome.

* * * *

When, therefore, we raise the question about religion, we must ask what *kind* of religion ought we to get religious

* See Figure II, page 75.

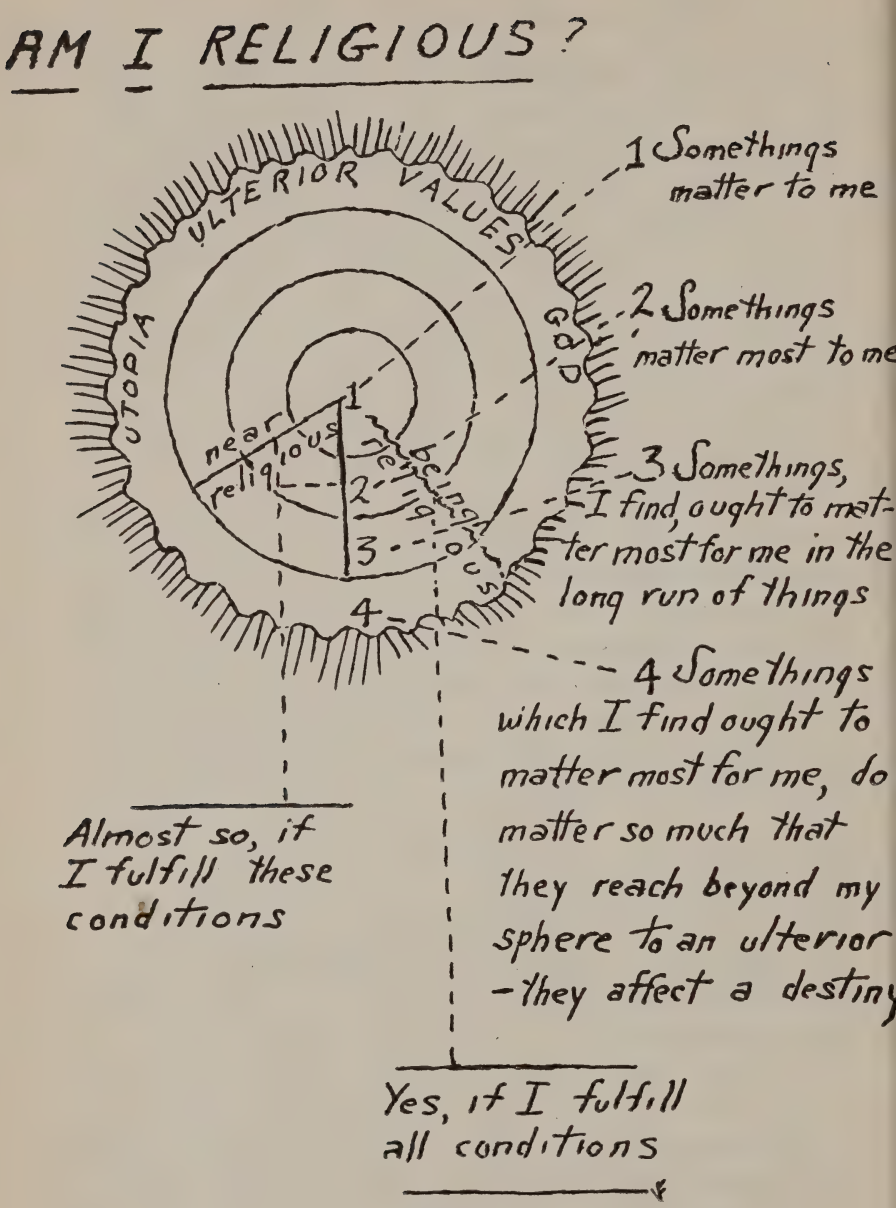
AM I RELIGIOUS?
ULTERIOR VALUES
UTOPIA
GOD
near religious
religious
religious
1
2
3
4
1 Somethings matter to me
2 Somethings matter most to me
3 Somethings, I find, ought to matter most for me in the long run of things
4 Somethings which I find ought to matter most for me, do matter so much that they reach beyond my sphere to an ulterior - they affect a destiny
Almost so, if I fulfill these conditions
Yes, if I fulfill all conditions

FIGURE I

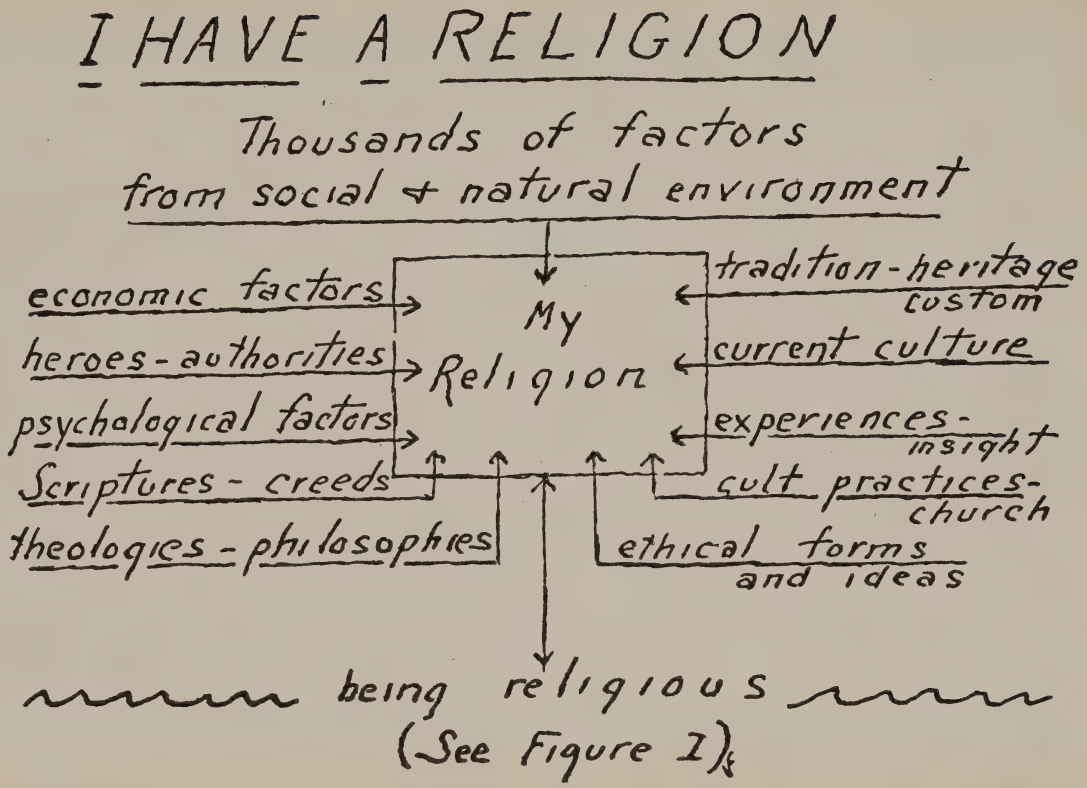
I HAVE A RELIGION
Thousands of factors
from social + natural environment
economic factors
heroes - authorities
psychological factors
Scriptures - creeds
theologies - philosophies
My
Religion
tradition - heritage
custom
current culture
experiences -
insight
cult practices -
church
ethical forms
and ideas
being religious
(See Figure I)

FIGURE II

about? We must appraise our sense of values. Feelings must be coupled with intelligence. Heaven spare us from simply being religious;* heaven help us to get a religion worthy of our religious spirits. Not any kind of religion but a *valid* kind is the major question at issue.

Some will immediately interpose: Why not take Christianity? Would not the answer then be very simple?

But this is not so easy as it sounds. For all through history there have been many Christianities. We may prefer St. Paul's and Augustine's Christianities to St. James's or that of Walter Rauschenbusch. Our age may demand one type in preference to another depending upon our cultural and social environments. A mystic's Christianity which goes to the extremes of isolation and asceticism, for instance, will hardly fit the crying needs of today's world. We cannot merely point to one Christianity and say that *that* is the answer. We must, as our fathers before us, make our own in consonance with our times and its demands. Nor do we have to take any particular label or brand. The label is not the important item. The label on the bottle does not make benzine what it is. Benzine makes for the label. Too many are over-anxious to connect themselves with some label and not, as they should, with the quality itself. What we need to discover, in this search, is a religion that ought to concern us in an ulterior sense, a religion that is significant and meaningful for us in terms of the best. How shall such a religion be found? It may be that our answer will be found in the reconstruction of religious beliefs regardless of sacred labels.

Let us return to the circles. We may there get our bearings.

Circle one: *Some things matter to me.* Many things matter. They are plural. I want: food, air, clothing, shelter, health, an income, friends, to be loved, success, to be respectable,

* See preceding chapter.

and, probably, immortality. Ought I to want anything? Answer: of course. Without wants we should be lower than the animals. Any religion worthy of devotion should meet our normal wants; in short, it should not be foreign to our nature. Many religions do not meet this very elementary test. Some religions have held up the ascetic life as ideal: denial of normal wants, self-torture, indiscriminate sacrifice. Some religions have been and are suitable for angels but not for humans. In some other world, or for some other beings, some religions may be worthy.

Puritanism (as popularly understood), for example, might, in its extreme form, be worthy of bloodless beings without ambitions and desires in a realm of rarefied atmosphere; but a puritanical religion flouting the human in us remains, in the long run, unworthy. This lesson is admirably summed up by a New Testament quotation: "Man was not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath was made for man." For people who like to deny their status as human beings, or who are disgusted with the world as it is, Puritanism might offer an escape. But in the world of tangibles which demands a struggle for existence and for progress, a religion which denies to men nature's elemental wants cannot appeal but to the abnormal. After all, we are human beings, whether we like it or not. A worthy religion for humans cannot flout legitimate human wants.

Circle two: *Some of our wants are underlined and underscored.* We evaluate some things better, something best, something worse. A religion worthy of our concern will reflect a good sense of values. But we know that we are often mistaken in our judgments of value; we choose the lesser good instead of the greater. Many of our wants are transitory. One type of bonnet is wanted this year and another type next Easter. Our age revels in fads. Religions reflect changing

values. Notions of what ought to matter more and most are expressed in religious beliefs. This emphasizes the fact that religions are natural products and not supernatural intrusions. Experience and reason force men to change historic religions as life teaches a new sense of values. What selected wants, then, ought to be reflected in a valid religion? This takes us to our next circle.

Circle three: *What ought to matter most in the long run?* If a religion is to be worthy of our loyalty what ought it stress among our wants? The answer to this question, perhaps, may be made more easy if we distinguish our wants from our needs.

A person may want things he does not need. He may even need things he does not want. The selected criteria of a good religion must stress, in the long run, our needs and the wanting of these needs. A discussion of needs takes us into the realm of ideals. Ideals should not be of the kind which float about only in a heaven above; ideals should be of the kind that are grounded in the give and take of human living itself. Our ideals must have contact with the ground underneath; otherwise they, like clouds, may drift into a far-off horizon that really does not matter for us. We have already stressed this point in connection with Puritanism. Ideals must have practical relevance.

It is not easy to answer the question of ideals in any blanket manner for the simple reason that people are at different stages and levels of culture. A Melanesian-island dweller will need some things that a New Yorker does not need, and vice versa. On the other hand, both may have certain *common needs.* It is with these common needs, needs which cut across time and space, which must be considered a fundamental part of any religion that is valid. Let us attempt to name some.

Good health ought to be such a need. Finding means to-

ward that end ought to be a need (e.g., sanitary methods, medical knowledge, etc.). An opportunity to express the best possibility of one's own personality is another need. Freedom to be one's self without the constraints which would smother one's best development is a universal need. Surely any religion that flouts such ideals is not worthy of support. And yet, religions have committed gross sins in this very regard. To be free to develop one's best self takes in a whole crowd of virtues: economic security, congenial social relations, an appropriate culture, education, consideration for those who are handicapped physically and mentally, mutual co-operation in the pursuit of improvements (improvements are bound up with change and finite perspective), together with the more specific virtues of honesty, kindliness, sympathy, honor, self-respect, truthfulness, justice, generosity, tolerance,—in short, all virtues which contribute to the fulfilment of man's best potentialities everywhere and whatsoever. A religion which calls out concern for human welfare, as growing insights reveal the conditions for that well-being, deserves our loyalty. In the scale of values, whatever stimulates human well-being, will be the considerations which, in the long run, should matter the most.

Circle four: *What ought to matter in terms of destiny?* That religion will satisfy which takes us beyond the superficial vista into a long range one; and the long range one will lead right into the matter of destiny. For some, we have indicated, this destiny will not reach beyond a hoped-for Golden Age, an earthly Utopia. "Humanists" these folks are called. Destiny, for real humanists, stops with a human horizon. It may be a worthy religion up to that point. For others, destiny will reach out into the very heart of things, beyond the human. "Believers in God" many of these folks are said to be. In a sense, both groups have a god; but the one is more circumscribed than the other.

When a person holds to this long range view, those things which he finds ought and do matter the most (human welfare and its attending virtues) are given a wider environment and setting than that of his own little experience or his own little world or his own circumscribed age: he looks out into the horizons. The believer in Divinity will say that the things that ought and do matter the most are grounded in a reality which shall somehow, someplace, somewhere, sometime, bring them to their fullest realization. We have these ideals because we are a part of the world that produces not only us but the ideals themselves. Call it Nature, call it Destiny, call it a personal God, call it what you will. Men have called it by many names. A religion that is worthy of our loyalty will call forth not only our loyalty to the best but give us the hopeful assurance that the best is the permanent, that the ideal is the real.

But, some one will perhaps say, may one not hold all this without the name of religion? May it not be a plain philosophy of life—a kind of general way of looking at general things? The answer is: it is all that, a philosophy of life, a general interpretation of things; but *all this is a religion in so far as it calls forth the religious spirit.* And the religious spirit, we have said, is the name given to that attitude where there is a concern about just such matters. A person, thus, may be religious without knowing it. His philosophy of life is his religion. To be religious is to be very human.

Now, in conclusion, it may be asked: What good is all this religion business anyway? Granted an ideal religion (such as outlined), what concern should it have for me? The answer is: it will not be a real religion unless it is of concern. But let us suppose that we really care about the things which we find, in the long run, ought to be of concern, things which reach out into a destiny—in other words, let us suppose that

we are religious about a religion that is worthy. What good is it?

The answer is very simple. It is this: All of us go through life with a pattern or a series of patterns through and by which we make our judgments, through and by which we make our decisions, through and by which we live. This pattern may be expressed or unavowed. It is an unconscious motivation, by and large. Why do we like some things and hate others? Why do we have a taste for this and a distaste for that? Why do we sacrifice for a given cause and not for another? Why do we go in this direction rather than in another? Simply because we have been building about ourselves, consciously and unconsciously through the years, certain patterns of thought and habit. We all have them and live by them. No one can honestly deny this. Our religion is just such a pattern. It is a kind of blue-print. It is, for those who find it worthy and become religious about it, a wind which blows upon their sails and directs their course. Or, to change the figure, it is a compass which for us points north.

If we all live by patterns, is it not important that we find for ourselves one which leads us in the direction that is worthy of the best in us, one that is consonant with the best in existence? The good of any worthy religion is just that. As such, all men have a religion (whether they admit the term or not). But some religions are bad and lead men to destruction. Others are good and lead men to a life that is abundant.

Many of us have more than one religion. The one we subscribe to in some formal way is our public religion; the other we unconsciously live by is our real, our private religion. It is important that the latter is of the kind that is worthy of our devotion. It is ideal if the two become one.

CHAPTER VI

What about Christianity?

SINCE SOME READERS of this book will probably think of religion in terms of their own background of Christianity, it may be well to consider this particular religion more specifically. What may we believe about Christianity?

When we take an *historical* view of what has been called the Christian religion we see such a variety of expressions that one wonders if there is such a thing as Christianity as such. The more one thinks about it, the more does one feel like talking about Christianities rather than Christianity. The singular is but the collective noun of a great variety. There was primitive Christianity, that of the Jewish Christians, of the Greek Christians, that of Paul, of John, of the Gnostics, of Origen, of Augustine, of Abailard, of St. Francis, of the Crusades, of Thomas Aquinas, of Luther at one time and Luther at another, of John Wesley—where shall we stop? Each man and each age has fashioned his and its own Christianity as temperament and circumstances have demanded. And this is not to be wondered at. Unless there had been these changes and developments there would have been no Christian *religion*; for, as we have seen, a religion is a body of meanings and practices which have reference to people who find certain things of ulterior nature that matter greatly to them. It is only natural to find that the things which mattered so much to Irenaeus did not matter so much to Luther and so all the way down the line. "Christianity" like the word

"religion" is an abstraction. There is no Christianity-in-general even as there is no religion-in-general—except as a collective name for particulars.

I have often thought that of the many attempts to answer the historical question "What is Christianity?" there is one approach, not sufficiently noted, which develops an illuminating answer. It may properly be called "the principle of contrast." We understand things best in terms of contrast. Let us look at this principle.

We are prone to look upon an antithesis as the opposite pole of its thesis and let it go at that. Or, with the philosopher, we may combine thesis and antithesis into a new synthesis and forget the underlying contrast. Perhaps we should do something else. Perhaps in the antithesis we may find a revelation of what the thesis is. Painters, architects, musicians, novelists and playwriters employ this principle to great advantage. Themes are illuminated by contrasting motifs and settings. The serenity of a face is not gotten across in a portrait with a background of sunshine; it takes some conflicting, thwarting and disturbing environmental situation or background to bring it out; there must be a storm, the terror of elements, or some threatening danger. Cut stone becomes ornamental if set amidst brick. The melody comes fully to its own only as it is set to contrasting rhythmic tensions and strangely disturbing nuances. The hero of the novel and play is no hero if there be no unrequited love, no struggle, no immorality, no cruel fate, no devil.

Now the modern historian tells us that an event must never be cut off from its environmental context if it is to be understood. The social, cultural and economic factors always play into ideas. History does not repeat itself. No two eras are ever exactly alike. Everything belongs somewhere and somewhen. Time and circumstance belong to the framework of

interpretation. It is not the general environment but the specific elements in the environment which make a given event understandable. The historian may well emulate the artist in studying specific contrasts, antitheses, in an environmental situation. The oppositions in the background may throw the clearest light upon the subject of discourse. Not the great outdoors in general but the definite oppositional forces of that great outdoors, those against which men and movements are pitted, reflect the character of men and events.

The religious movement vaguely called Christianity has been studied and interpreted for centuries as a kind of entity persisting unchanged throughout the years, untouched and unspoiled in its essential framework by succeeding generations. We now have become disillusioned about that. One of the hotly debated questions of our time is how far removed the New Testament interpreters themselves were from the interpretation of the Founder. To understand primitive Christianity one has to learn to read not merely the lines of the record but between the lines; one must get back to the contrasting forms and patterns which specifically break through and illuminate the scenes.

When we attempt to answer the historical question "What may we believe about the religion of Jesus?" we are thrown into the task of reconstructing material for only the sketchiest of sketches, the suggestion of a line here and a line there with patches in between. Much aid, however, in bringing these lines into some tangible form, into some kind of image, may be had if we study the specific contrasts and tensions which appear to surround that figure. Let us suggest a number of these contrasts as we can discern them with the materials at hand. And let imagination help us to this end. For imagination is not foreign to the historical approach; it is a

tool with which explorations even in the realm of fact are conducted.

We know, for example, that there was no dearth of religion in Jesus' time. Religion was a part of the everyday mores. The Jewish people were intensely religious. Is this a contrast? I believe it is. If religion alone were of sufficient concern, why should the new leader have been so concerned over it? He did not have to make the plea for *more* religion; he might have done well to have made a plea for less of it. But what is his plea? It is for *another type* of religion than that in his specific environment. The suggestion here is that religion is not enough; the *kind* of religion is the paramount question. And he proceeded to show how his own religion was superior to that of his neighbors. When a person says "we need more religion in this world" or when he says "I am religious" and thinks this is sufficient—he shows little understanding and superficial insight (as stated before). It may be better to have no religion at all and to be irreligious in many instances. There are all kinds of religion. The contrast here, then, is *one kind* set over the prevailing religion of orthodox Judaism of his day. What that orthodoxy was, leads us to further considerations.

What was his attitude toward tradition? There was a great emphasis upon tradition in his day. The fathers were quoted; texts were pointed to for authority; custom was held up as normative. The lines here and the lines there show plainly that he did not ridicule the past but moved beyond it. There was the church at Jerusalem; he attended it on occasion but he also attended his own church wherever it happened to be. There were the great religious parades; he followed into line (on occasion) but he had processions of his own. There was the feast of the Passover and in it he took part; but he instituted his own Supper. There were the

Scriptures and he quoted from them; but he set up his own scripture: "I say unto you." There were the prophets and the law and he gave them their due reverence; but he was his own prophet and he set up his own commandments.

Scholars are today telling us that practically all of the teachings of Jesus can be duplicated by other ages and other sources.* The Jewish prophets of old (to mention only the religion of his background) had taught the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; the Messianic idea was a heritage; high morality was a part of the historical picture; the forgiving mercy, the loving kindness and tenderness of God were old themes (*cf.* the twenty-third, the forty-sixth and other Psalms). Humanitarian ideals have never been confined to one people or one group. The Christianity of Jesus, in other words, recognized the good no matter where; and wherever there is good, there he saw the spirit of God. He did not begin anew; he built upon the old and he transmuted it to a new level. What does this mean? This means that his method was not iconoclastic but re-constructive. It means that tradition has lessons of insight to be handed down but tradition in itself is not the last lesson of such insight. The contrast then? Over against the old, he pitted not so much the new as the old transmuted into something better. This is the conservative liberalism of the Founder's type of Christianity.

What was his attitude toward organizations? We shall touch upon this in another chapter. Suffice it to say that the contrast is very clear here: he seemed to shy at a too hard and fast institutionalism. He refused to join one of the competing parties of his day, his writing upon the sand—all this is symbolic. A system of ethical codes worked out into the

* See, for example, the excellent little book *Religious Tradition and Myth* (1937), by Erwin R. Goodenough.

finest of details was offered him in orthodox Judaism; and he set himself against legalizing moral conduct and hence left no book of rules, no systematic ethics, no system of theology. Though he retained much of his inherited morality, he transmuted that morality beyond book-keeping, beyond arithmetical measure. The good life, he seemed to suggest, is a quality free from rules and regulations.

What was his attitude toward the several social panaceas of his day? There were the Herodians who offered to play Caesar's game; the Pharisees who would tease God to intrude into the situation and bring freedom and honor to his chosen; there were the Sadducees who played every kind of game to advantage; and there were the Essenes who taught the life of asceticism, self-denial. The restlessness of the age in questions political, social and economic is well-known. In contrast, what was his answer?

He took men by the arm and walked and talked with them; he hid away in some humble home and chatted quietly; he called down the tax-collector watching the crowds from the tree and went along home with him; he took only twelve aside and concentrated upon them; he knew folks not as members of the human race but as individuals. A person is not the crowd; not even the children. Indeed, he talked to the masses, but he distrusted them. He dispersed the throngs by ingenious methods, curbing unbridled enthusiasm and impending violence. He taught human graces while men shouted for mass rebellion. He joined no party; he played no politics; he had no planned economy. He favored the poor, the nameless, those south of main street. And yet: he announced a kingdom, a social order. What is the contrast here?

Social reform and social upheaval versus individual transformation—which? The answer seems clear: the individual is emphasized, underlined, paid attention to. We wonder

why he spent so much time with "the uncultured," the nobodies. The answer: there is the recognition of a subtle social law: society moves only at the pace of the laggards. There is a social strategy in this and it was not the strategy of orthodoxy. Society greatly affects the individual; but the individuals have it in their power to change the society which changes them.

Today we ask: was he, then, on the side of the capitalists, the fascists, the communists, the democrats? The answer: he staked his claim upon something which is basic to all social schemes; he left the details to the demands of time. The individual and society are components, not opposites, even as our lives are conditioned not by heredity on the one hand and environment on the other but by the mutual interplay of both. But since the two are mutually interwoven and important, how can reform be accomplished? Reform has to begin somewhere. The strategy he seems to have adopted was in trying to persuade enough individuals to desire to right themselves and to right others; and to right others, enough individuals have to combine to make the environment suitable for that reconditioning. In the last analysis the individuals who constitute the masses hold the power. To change society for the better, in the long run, you have to have enough individuals who are willing to enlist enough individuals who in turn are sufficient in number and devoted to high purposes to make their influence felt. In contrast to mass action, then, we find the personal emphasis. The kingdom is not a collective abstraction but a result of individuals in union.

What of himself? Did he exalt himself as Deity? The record shows an unmistakable humility. He never put on a display of self. When banners were about to be unfurled, he disappeared. He chose the lowliest beast of burden upon

which to ride as he went into the triumphant parade. His ears did not itch for praise. It was enough if the thing he stood for was accomplished. What is the contrast? The expected Messiah was to be king, to be glorified, to sit at the right hand; the nations would bow before *him*. But what is his answer? Not I but the cause. A disciple of God is one not in name but one in fact. And the lesson: the label does not make worth, worth makes for the label.

Let us summarize these contrasts: on the one hand: religion, religion, religion; on the other: a certain kind of religion; on the one hand: tradition; on the other: tradition transmuted; on the one hand: the Scriptures, the law, the prophets, the observances, the fathers; on the other: a spirit, marks upon the sand, the unwritten word; on the one hand: Puritan ethics with rules of "dos and donts" and a chorus of ecclesiastical lawyers interpreting the interpretations; and on the other: freedom not from the law but a freedom beyond the measure of any law, epitomized by the shock of breaking the Holy Day, the Sabbath; on the one hand: social measures to relieve an intolerable economic and political situation; and on the other: an emphasis upon the individual as the basis of strategy for a more inclusive and lasting social reform; on the one hand: reverence for a supernatural Divine Being to be worshipped and praised and heralded with a reward of special favors; and on the other: regard for the Divine Being in terms of a Kingdom of social relations for all. And there are more contrasts if we but see them and follow them through.

Now we come to the question: Which "Christianity" approaches the ideal religion already discussed?

There are those literalists who would have us return to a primitive type of Christianity. A certain young man, a few years ago, went around to the various colleges in this country

urging youth to take up Christianity as it was in the days of old. He derided them for wearing jewelry, for spending their parents' money, for their concern over the fashions and fads of dress. "Look at me," he said. "Not a thing I have on have I asked anyone for. I simply trust God. I do not know where my next meal is coming from; nor do I ask. But God provides." He looked as if he needed a religion which would deal more kindly with him. I felt pity in my heart as I saw his bare feet and the shabby coat. He was intelligent, a graduate from one of the best theological seminaries in the country. He talked with ease and grace; and, what is more, he made a profound impression upon his hearers. (I had a lot of absences from my classes the days he visited the campus.)

There are churches, too, which claim to be close to the pristine form of Christianity. They will not use grape juice at communion because Jesus used wine (and yet, they kneel at an altar when, to be consistent with historic practice, they should be reclining on sofas, or, perhaps, seated on the floor). They will not use individual cups at communion because the earlier days used the common cup. They will not allow their clergymen to wear gowns, a ministerial garb or a doctor's gown, since such was not worn by the Teacher and disciples (and yet they do not wear flowing robes and sandals). They will not sprinkle water in baptism because the early converts were presumably submerged in the river; or, they will not submerge bodies because the converts could have been in the river and received baptism without necessarily having been submerged. They will not baptize infants because Jesus was thirty years old before he was baptized. They will not sing words or tunes of hymn-writers since Jesus used the inspired Psalms of David.

Now, to try to go back to Jesus after any such manner is

to fail to appreciate primitive Christianity itself. For, as we have suggested, with him it was not tradition but tradition transmuted. The records show that his mind was not fettered, that while the good of the old is to be preserved, the good of the new is to be incorporated. In this Jesus is always on the side of the liberals. The Christianity, in other words, of his day was not something cut and dried; if it had been we would have many detailed blue prints. Each age will fashion upon the old its own type of Christianity in the light of new insights and experience.

Back to primitive Christianity? Yes and no. Back yet forward. This is the very path which has been marked out through the ages wherever this religion was a significant and vital power in the growing experience of men. Men have fashioned Christianity to their pressing needs; Luther fashioned his with the help of Paul and Augustine; Abailard fashioned his in the spirit of James; Christian humanists today who emphasize conduct rather than theology may find their pattern of Christianity in the Apostolic fathers (who made relatively little of theology).

It is said that our modern Christianity should stand out more against the world. This is but a half truth. It should be a type that can make ideals and perspectives more real as contrasted with a world which wears these down; but it must be in contact with the culture of the age or else it is something foreign and unreal.

* * * *

Let us re-think our previous discussion of an *ideal* religion, and let us consider once more the thesis which underlines this whole treatment, *viz.*, that our cultural circumstances will reflect the type of religion which will be vital to us.

An *ideal* Christianity will be one which will match an ideal religion; those elements in historic Christianity (and any religion possessing them) will be taken which will reflect these ideals. The others (and there are many bad features in historic Christianity) will be sloughed off. Here they are (and we follow the preceding chapter): an ideal Christianity will sustain and nurture normal, sane, legitimate, human and natural wants; it will bring into relief a valid sense of values; it will call forth needs as well as wants, such as the development of self into its fuller and richer expressions, it will hold out economic security, congenial relations with others, it will educate in the life of reason and critical insight, it will encourage the special virtues and graces of kindness, sympathy, self-respect, love of truth, of justice, generosity, forbearance, honor; it will set up a focal point of destiny (however considered) in which the assurance is given that the best is the permanent and fundamentally real. If this sounds too trite, let it be remembered that such ideals have not permeated Christian beliefs and practices in the ages gone by and even in the present age.

There are Christian groups which flout normal human wants; the ascetic life which is abnormal has been (and still is) set up as an ideal. Ideals have been set so high that they have been reserved for angels rather than human beings. Christian groups have set their ideals so high that they have had to teach the corollary doctrines that man is a worm of the dust, that there is no good whatsoever in him, that the kingdom will never come on this earth, that pessimism in regard to a social gospel is inevitable, that we need a Second Coming before we shall begin our march to Utopia, that human progress is a myth. There are Christian groups which have turned upside down all sense of values. They say unless you believe in the Virgin Birth you are not a Christian; unless

you believe in consubstantiation or transubstantiation you are outside the pale; unless you believe as the sixteenth-century Reformers you are an incurable heretic; unless you believe in the miracles you are an agnostic or unChristian; unless you are immersed you are unregenerate; unless you are a member of this particular ecclesiastical body you are damned, or at least, not on the one ship going to port; unless you believe Jesus is the second person in the Trinity you are not of the elect. These same groups forget that perhaps the virgin birth doctrine is at most a corollary doctrine and not fundamental to the highest view of the historical Jesus (a doctrine, moreover, difficult to demonstrate by unprejudiced interpretation of the written record); that the inspiration of the Scriptures does not make the Bible significant but that the Bible containing significant truths may make for some view of inspiration; that one may believe in the supremacy of Jesus without committing oneself on the question of miracles or the Greek metaphysics involved in the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity; that one may believe and act without the usual sacred labels and still be a Christian.

There are those Christian groups which have been blind to man's crying need for economic security and have excused themselves with some sort of self-satisfied philanthropy; many, many times have these groups stood out against new insights, new truths, decried against the horrible "social gospel," excommunicated men who later were made saints, practiced anything but charity and forbearance, justice and honor, and even have prided themselves on ignorance of history, philosophy, theology, the natural sciences, in the interest of preserving their own mistaken notions of what they call the revelation of the Spirit. There are those groups who have set up a destiny which is good for themselves and hell for others or a destiny from which many men would pray

that they might be spared. Not always have they held out the permanent to be the best; some of the baser of men's ways have been held up as God's.

Of course, the cultural pattern will always determine how far people will move in the direction of discriminate ideals. In the opinion of this writer, no century, in spite of the present world-wide wars, has been so self-conscious of ideals as this present age of religious transition: we are more than ever conscious now of the need for more intelligence in religious beliefs (*e.g.*, recent Biblical studies have paved the way to a better knowledge of historic Christianity), a more sensitive social conscience (the present wars, including so-called "class wars," reflect an aroused social and mass conscience asserting itself in the decay of outworn social orders), the spreading of educational facilities (radio, movies, colleges, magazines), and the feeling that whatever else our religion is to be, it must be intelligently tuned to an eventual self-fulfilment for all sons of men.

We shall have more to say on matters of Christian belief in the chapters which follow.

A concluding word about Christianity. Some time ago, I attended a lecture on the appreciation of painting by an American artist. Among his exhibits was one picture which I thought was plainly crude. To my amazement, toward the close of his talk, he walked over to it and pointing to it with pride said "I believe this is perhaps one of the best of my works." I looked again at the scene: there appeared to be animals in the foreground, something that looked like a fence, a group of people standing by quite indistinguishable to my gaze. I listened carefully to his enthusiastic appreciation of this "work of art." Finally he said: "Some of you are looking at the objects and you cannot make them out. You will look in vain. For the artist is not presenting a

photograph but trying to present the atmosphere of the scene. It is twilight and a purple haze has come over the place. One does not see objects clearly at dusk. I believe I have been able to get the proper tints in the picture, showing sufficient outlines of objects which melt into the darkening shadows—in short, to portray that transition of the cycle of time which is neither day nor night. It is the *atmosphere* of the scene which the artist feels and paints. One must try to get the feel of twilight and the summer's sacrifice to autumn."

As I sat and listened to him a new appreciation of painting came over me. One has to sense underlying meanings in certain works of art, not chiseled-out objects. And I thought: Is there not a homily here in the portrayal of the Founder of Christianity as found in the records? Was he not trying to convey an atmosphere rather than a detailed design for living, an impression rather than a candid-camera picture of the Divine? Perhaps the painter of such scenes and the religious genius have very much in common. I left the lecture room with something more than an appreciation of art.

CHAPTER VII

Divinity

THE TERM "GOD" is one that does not carry obvious meaning. Some people believe in a God which would not be a God to others. Primitive man, for example, had his Gods; but few people today would honor his Gods as Gods. Father Divine in New York is God to a Harlem following; but he is far from God to those on the Columbia University campus not many city-blocks away.

When most of us think of God, we think of a Personal Being who is Chairman, Director and Administrator of the great Establishment, the World, created by Him. We use the masculine pronoun since that seems, in our social heritage, to represent Headship, Responsibility. In Hebrew and Jewish custom, the father, as is well known, was the head of the family—only he and his son (or sons) counted. That ideology persists in Western religious tradition. God, however, for many is Mother as well as Father; for millions in the East, God is a kind of inexpressible, immaterial All, beyond the language of description. In certain quarters today, God is but the name for the great ideals of mankind.

These are ideas. They may be true or they may not. They may represent the real or they may not. They may be the result of speculative reasoning. Or, they may be the symbols of the Object of religious devotion. Speculative reason has one approach; the religious person another.

For instance, in the one case God may be reasoned to be

the Essence of things, the Unmoved Mover, the First Cause, the Source of all things, the Idea of Ideas, the Integrating Factor of the World, the End toward which all creation moves.

In the other case, God is That Something, however conceived, which is of the greatest concern to a person as he sees the world and life as a whole. God, thus, may be for the religious person a kind of Social Utopia, or Father of mankind, or King, or the Invisible Presence.

The distinction between these two approaches lies not in the concepts *themselves* but in the *attitude* towards them. When a philosopher or a theologian speaks of God he usually is *acknowledging* or *affirming* his belief or theory, God being, perhaps, the best explanation of why things are so (or whatever the theory may be). The religious person is not merely acknowledging or affirming God, he is *using* God, however conceived. This, we have already tried to make clear in the earlier chapters.

If I ask you "Do you believe in a Divinity?", this may mean: "Do you affirm a Center to things or a First Cause"? (or something similar), or, "Is there Something at the heart of things that makes a difference to you?" The one is a philosophical or theological question; the other concerns the religious attitude. Suppose the answer to be "yes" in both cases. The philosopher's concepts of God and the average religious person's will tend to be noticeably different. (Not that a philosopher may not be religious, but only in his capacity as a professional.) Whereas the one will reflect ideas that are more on the side of the abstract, the other will lean toward the concrete. The one may be speaking of the Essence of things, the other as "my Heavenly Father." The reason for this general characteristic difference is clear: the philosopher or theologian is thinking his way, the average

person who is genuinely religious is giving a testimony to a felt experience. This is why it is often difficult to bridge the apparent (but not fundamental) gap between the philosopher and the simple believer. The philosopher may regard the religious person's concepts as altogether too human-like (he may call such simple beliefs by the horrible term "anthropomorphism" which means making God in human image); while the religious person may look upon the philosopher as one far removed in "idle speculation." Both, however, may be speaking of the same God although they do not realize it; the difference being not only that the one is affirming and the other deeply concerned, but that the one tends to speak in terms that are general and abstract while the other is speaking in terms close to him, intimate to his felt experience.

All words are symbols. They "point to," "refer to" something beyond themselves. Some words carry vivid imagery, some less so. The average person seeks the more concrete image because it can be grasped in everyday experience.

All of us can "image" things which are presented in space and time, things which have shape and stimulate color, things which belong somewhere and somewhen: a cat, spinach, the late Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the microphone, the sea. But it is more difficult to "image" something that cannot be localized in time and space, to which can be given no measurements of weight, size, shape, form, or to which there can be no specific reference as to taste, color and sound. For example, try to conceive of "religion," "squared circle," "generation," "science," "the world," "ideals." Note how your mind immediately seeks for some image: "religion" becomes perhaps "certain religious individuals"; "squared circle" becomes a figure on the blackboard which is a square drawn with a circle around it (however unsatisfactory this may be);

"generation" becomes "this period of time" or "eighteenth century England"; "science" becomes geology or physics or chemistry; "the world" becomes multitudinous stars, planets, spatially set apart with, perhaps, a dim rim around them; "ideals" become a number of specific virtues, e.g., the kindness of Mr. Milquetoast, the generosity of the widow Fike, the absolute integrity of Professor Lathermore. The general words are abstract: religion, generation, science, and the rest. For the average person, including the most of us, the closer we get to images which are concrete, the more real and significant will be the meaning.

Now, the term "Divinity" or "God" belongs on the side of those words which are farthest removed from imagery. When a deacon was asked to declare his idea of God, he rose in his place at the prayer meeting to give an honest testimony: "To tell you the truth, God, to me, is a kind of purplish oblong blur." Anyone can thus test this out for himself. And the reason is clear. What we mean by the word "God" is a Something-or-other which is not encompassed by space and time, Something which cannot be measured on the scales, Something which cannot be tasted or smelled, seen or touched, Something beyond sensory experience.

The same situation holds with reference to ourselves. Who are You? Immediately, the tendency is to define yourself in terms of your bodily manifestations, for the simple reason that this is the easiest way, the most concrete reply. But it is simply not true to say that you have "seen" yourself, tasted or touched the real you. The kernel of ourselves is abstract (beyond such categories, beyond shape, size, form, beyond color and weight). Materialists are people who try to squeeze the whole self into the concrete expressions or manifestations of it, in physical terms.

The point at which we have now arrived is this: There are

words which point to items that cannot be localized or limited by space and time. Such words lack in themselves adequate imagery. Living as we do in commerce with space and time we tend to seek concrete expressions, concrete imagery, for such terms.

Thus, when we speak of "God" we tend to speak in double meaning: the imageless, that is, the abstract; and the imageful, that is, the concrete. In the one case we may try to speak of a Time-and-Space-Transcending-Whatever, or, a Fundamental That Which (not very satisfactory), or, the Nameless One. In the other, the way is wide open for concrete images: King, Father, Zeus, Supreme Person. Our conversation now slides along more easily. Religions are chock full of such concrete expressions. It becomes, then, an easy step to translate the more concrete images into still more concrete forms: into statues, idols, totems, paintings, into the niceties of ritual. The life after death is pointed to as "up there," a "Jerusalem, the golden, with milk and honey," and all the rest. We shall always have such concrete expressions for the intangibles, so long as we move in measureable time and space.

Thus, all concepts of God are symbolic and as symbols they should be treated. It is no accident that some of our greater religious leaders were poets, in spirit and fact, great story tellers, that some of our best religious literature is written in the form of myths, parables and psalms. This, because they become much more concrete; and, too, because they are rendering a service, not to themselves (a mistake which many interpreters make) but to something beyond themselves. Such, for example, was the art of Plato in employing myths and the genius of Jesus in the fine use of parable. To treat our conceptions of God beyond what they are capable of bearing, to treat them, that is, literally rather

than symbolically, is to run amuck into all kinds of difficulty and paradox. (The great German philosopher, Immanuel Kant showed clearly, in a critical analysis of mind, how great are the limitations of thought.) Theological quarrels might have been less in number and intensity had theologians been poets and artists and even musicians.

To believe in God is to believe in Something beyond the measurable, Something that transcends our little world of finite experience, Something that exceeds the collective moments of human duration, Something that is sufficient to make meaning out of this whole business of life and that accounts adequately for the world into which we are born. Idolatry is idolatry when that Something is made less than Itself. But there are few intentional idolaters. If one understood so-called idol worship as practiced, one will find that the element which made such practices possible is not absent: the element of symbol making. The invitation to idolatry comes with the worship of the symbol, where the real is taken to be imprisoned in it.

To believe in God does not necessarily force us to believe in two wholly separated worlds. God may well be related to the physical world in a way not unlike human spirits (partially, of course) are related to their bodies and environment: in commerce with it, present in it, but transcending it as does spirit its body. To transcend does not mean to fly off into another totally different existence; it may well be that this Universe betrays both capacities of immanence and transcendence—at least, our own experience shows this to be not only possible but real.

The symbols we give to God will naturally reflect our cultural level. An illiterate red-hot revivalist who scornfully mocks the so-called "intellectuals" will naturally speak of God in terms of his cultural experience: perhaps, that Big

Man up there (pointing to the blue sky). The mature college student who has been thinking his way through on such questions will have concepts commensurate with his intellectual framework. Both conceptions, however, will remain symbolic. The classical attributes of God, such as omniscience (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful), omnipresent (everywhere present), as well as the usually heard attributes of loving, kind, merciful, terrible, just,—all these are symbols. To admit this is not to say that symbols are fictions, any more than to declare that a New Testament parable is a fiction. Fiction is decided on other grounds (after the manner of truth*). The antithesis of fiction is truth, not symbol. While symbols may promote fiction, they are not necessarily fictitious. They may well be bearers of truth. All language is a tool (symbol, again); and like tools, terms and phrases and words must be tried out to ascertain if they serve their purpose and to what degree, or, if they are but impediments or even useless.

Some readers reflecting upon the thesis of this chapter, viz., that whatever we say of God is symbolic, may be thinking: such a view is certainly radical. Is not all this far, very far, from the orthodox conceptions? Has not God been spoken of, down through the years, in terms of definite attributes by our traditionally respectable religious thinkers, theologians and religious leaders? Were we not taught to say, with the creeds, that God is masculine gender, a person, omnipotent, a loving Father, and all the rest? Surely, no one but a radical would treat such terms as anything but literal.

Let us pause for the moment and look at the matter. If I

* On this point, the tests of truth, see the discussion "Theories of Truth" in my *First Adventures in Philosophy* (1936), p. 506 ff. We have not the space here to develop the criteria of truth.

asked you to name for me an outstanding conservative church, you would, sooner or later, mention: the Roman Catholic. This is correct. And if I asked you to name the man within that church who stands out as perhaps its most respected systematic thinker, the name often quoted in Catholic books, you would say (if you knew): St. Thomas Aquinas. This is correct. Now, Aquinas, indeed, was a great intellect, a student of wide and profound dimensions. Nothing in critical religious thought accessible to his day seemed to have escaped his critical mind. He wrote a work called *Summa Theologica* published now in so many volumes that it takes up more room than can be accommodated on an ordinary shelf of books.

In the very first volume he treats of God. And about half way through he has a chapter which he calls "The Names of God." It would do everyone good to read that chapter. It would make humble the most proud intellect. Some years ago, after I had been discussing the symbolic character of our ideas of God with a class consisting of clergymen, Dean Shailer Mathews, then of the University of Chicago Divinity School, took me aside for conversation. "Your views are similar to Aquinas," he said, in so many words. Then he pulled down from the shelf, in a professor's study, the first volume by Aquinas and began to read. To my own utter amazement I found that the general thesis upon which my mind had been reflecting was indeed similar, in essence, to what had long ago been said. What might, at first blush, appear to be a radical view turns out to have an old conservative defender (although, for his own day, Aquinas was far from conservative).

In Aquinas's discussions he contends that the names we give to the Divine Essence are representations, pointings. They do not, they cannot, represent that Substance fully for

It is above all that we can understand. Our intellect does not comprehend what is beyond itself; and the names at best "signify." Let the great Catholic sage speak for himself:

Since . . . words are signs of ideas, and ideas the similitude of things, it is evident that words relate to the meaning of things signified through the medium of the intellectual conception. It follows therefore that we can give a name to anything in as far as we can understand it. Now it was shown . . . that in this life we cannot see the essence of God; but we know God from creatures as their principle, and also by way of excellence and remotion. In this way therefore He can be named by us from creatures, yet not so that the name which signifies Him expresses the divine essence in itself.

The reason why God has no name, or is said to be above being named, is because His essence is above all that we understand about God and signify in word.

We cannot know the essence of God in this life, as He really is in Himself; but we know Him accordingly as He is represented in the perfections of creatures; and thus the names imposed by us signify Him in that manner only.*

The one thing, says Aquinas, which we can say about Deity, as we reflect upon the question, is that IT IS. The HE WHO IS is the name for Existence. If we would give to that Existence dependable characteristics we must move beyond the realm of intellect and observation into that of faith; and to move into the realm of faith, is to move into the sphere of revelation. The That of God, in other words, is certain; this fact reason gives and the senses report. But the What of the That must come from the Realm which is beyond the limitations of unaided understanding.

* *Summa Theologica*, Part I. Question 13, Article I; Ques. 13, Art. 2. More passages might easily be quoted to the same point.

I have taken time to record Aquinas's views because it is my belief that unless we acknowledge our limitations with the utmost frankness, as did Aquinas, we shall court insuperable difficulties and encourage useless distrust and wranglings amongst ourselves in the matters of our beliefs about God. We may not follow St. Thomas as he argues, in his own way, for tradition and faith in a type of revelation, but we do well to allow him to lead us into this one fundamental and elementary lesson about God: the cup of human wisdom cannot contain that which is greater than itself (although, of course, it may contain some information). That cup may contain enough to give indication of what is beyond and above, but it is only a measure, a symbol of that Something greater.

The use of analogy in speaking about God, then, is wholly natural and permissible. An analogy is not to be taken literally: it serves its complete purpose if it clarifies meaning. "I am the door"; "I am the vine, ye are the branches"; "Ye are the salt of the earth";—these are familiar examples from New Testament literature, replete with analogies.

Analogies, of course, must have reality-feeling * for the people they serve—otherwise there is no point to them. Many of the analogies, accordingly, which have come down from the past, which served well for an earlier day, are no longer real to us. We must find those which enter into our own experience, into our own day.

Recently, I was given one that seems exceptionally well suited. It was contained in a short, unpublished manuscript sent me by Dr. Edward Scribner Ames, formerly the dean of the Disciples' Divinity House and now emeritus professor of philosophy in the University of Chicago. In writing about God, Professor Ames employs the analogy of Alma Mater.

* See p. 20.

Alma Mater is a composite entity: she is pictured as a physical thing of beauty: beautiful buildings and campus; she is the body of living people (of those, living and dead who have shared together a common spirit and aim and work): trustees, faculty, students, donors, friends, townsfolk, alumni; she is the vehicle by which a common social situation and group interests are shared: in the impartation and the furtherance of knowledge and wisdom and in the direction of youth for life's adventure; she is a personable thing, to whom hymns are written, songs are sung in her honor and loyalty pledged and faithfully brought into remembrance and support. She is both body and spirit, but the spirit is of her essential nature. Now, God, like Alma Mater, is a Something that is both seen and unseen. The world of reality that is seen is the world of things, like stars and rocks and organisms. God is all that. But amidst these seen things are the unseen which also belong to God. God (for Professor Ames) is reality idealized and personified; idealized in terms of the finer things of life and personified because it is our natural manner of expressing our affections and our highest regard for the finer things. Like Alma Mater, God is the name or the symbol for the whole; but it is more: it is that whole in its finest aspects, what men have called "the good" which, in the main, exceeds "the bad." ["In the beginning . . . God created . . . and saw that it was very good . . ."] This reality, says Professor Ames, is not a mere subjective experience; it is not a projection of the human mind. "It is as objective as the sunshine, the stars . . . [the] reality by which we live."

Pursuing our subject further, we turn briefly to the question: What makes people believe that there is this supreme Factor to which they give worship and upon which they pin their hopes and from which they draw meaning to life?

The impact of social tradition, of course, is most evident.

Children do not talk "instinctively" about God. They are taught as they are taught a religion, and only slowly understand. The concepts which they come to acquire are, of course, like all imitations, those of their elders. Many people never get beyond this child-stage (as already discussed). But all this aside, let us turn to some of those considerations which arise out of maturer reflection upon the subject.

There is one consideration which, although not without evident difficulties, is not to be shunted. It is known as the principle of general agreement (*consensus gentium*). That which, in the long run and in so many places and under such varied circumstances, has been believed and hoped is not without great significance. True, there are many beliefs which have long been held and by many people, which have turned out to be erroneous. But again—there are many which have an overwhelming persistency that seems to draw from the depths of man's inner nature. One of the most remarkable characteristics of man everywhere, with minor exceptions to the overwhelming rule, is his natural affinity with a hopeful attitude toward life. In spite of blind alleys and reverses, struggles and frustrations, man goes on with eyes lifted toward the hills. It is part and parcel of the heroic side of his nature.* And this hope is reflected in his belief in a God as a Power that will direct things through even as It has brought things to pass.

Strange as it seems, man has everywhere held some kind of concept of a God, a Something that appears to matter supremely, more than anything else, a Something that is not destroyed in a changing world. We change; but there It is; we find new lands and new worlds to conquer, but there It is still unconquered; however far we move on in our sophistications, in our critical wrestlings with our inherited beliefs,

* See pp. 34, 35.

there It stands beckoning us on and on. There are ideals in this world; there is something that matters in the moral sphere which men have called "conscience" and which, whatever we say of it, will not down; there is something that holds things together, sustaining order in spite of threatening disorder in the world of man's relations and in the world of suns and stars; there is something that makes man strive and hope and urges on and on. This Something seems not confined to men; it is reflected in nature (its orderly processes), a principle of things to whatever ends. Men have not agreed, as we have said, to call this Something by the same name—but there is a common ground of acknowledgment upon which they seem universally to meet. They may be wrong. They may have believed in the integrity of the Universe where there is none; they may have believed that their moral sensibilities have a grounding in the structure of reality and they may be under illusions; their high hopes may be but the reflections from the mirror only of themselves. Yet, conscious of this possibility, they persist in their faith.

The fact that widespread hunger is answered by a nature which makes food possible, that widespread need for oxygen and iron and nitrogen and all the rest of the elements which go into the making of life is answered by a nature with those very elements, that widespread demand for opposite sexes is answered by nature with these opposites—only make more than plausible the belief that persistent and normal needs are answered by the same nature with a something that corresponds to them.

There is something uncanny about all this. Why should we be at all? Why should there be this organism at all, with its hopes and faiths reaching out beyond the horizon? Here are millions of sons and daughters of man, throughout all the ages, who have so strongly felt that there is this Some-

thing called Divinity or God and to which many of them have given even sacrificial allegiance. Why should they feel this way at all? Why not go through life, eke out an existence and some day die, without all this wrinkling of the eyebrows upon ulterior questions? Yet, here they are: wondering, hoping, longing, believing, and nursing great expectations? This is what some people mean when they say that if there were no God, men would have invented one. But why invent one at all? Does not this universal dogged persistence mean something? Why should it be so commonplace? Are the common things so untrustworthy?

With the passing of years, I have become more and more impressed by the statement of the seventeenth-century French philosopher, René Descartes, concerning the existence of God. My own version of his thought runs through my mind somewhat as follows: Man is a tiny speck in the huge vastness of existence; a very tiny speck. He is fearfully limited, imperfect and circumscribed. Viewed in contrast to the vastness of the world of time and space, he is hardly better off than the worms, the little creeping things smugly nestled to a patch of earth. And yet: this little mite of man possesses the most tremendous ideas, enjoys the most amazing hopes, entertains thoughts of himself and his destiny which outstrip even the largest environment of his earthly acquaintance. (The possibilities of the mind of man—in this atomic age into which we have barely crossed the threshold in dealing with physical nature—are simply staggering!) What a worm man is! Said Descartes (paraphrasing him): Here am I, insignificant speck that I am; and yet, here am I with ideas of limitless space, limitless time, with ideas of perfection, dreaming impossible dreams, and though knowingly finite and imperfect, yet do I speak of the infinite, the supreme good and even the Absolute. How could little "I" have such big ideas?

Where in the world did I get them? Nothing I know about in my experience with the world can match them; they are bigger than my world of experience. Surely, I could not have concocted such big ideas all by myself. They must have come from somewhere, outside of me ("adventitious" ideas, he called them). I am possessed by them; I did not create them. They are already in the mind when I woke up to my inner self. They must have been put there. There is in me a peculiar presence of Something that is big enough to create in me such big ideas. I am compelled to assert Something. This is God, present in my mind, possessing me with something of Itself. In other words, one believes in a God because already God is in the mind prompting ideas and ideals greater than man, by his own limitations, could ever conceive for himself.*

There is another consideration for belief in God as we reflect upon the question. For want of a better term, it may be called the essence-approach. Everything appears to have some center, essence, the touchy-spot which makes things what they are, the factor which makes things click. There may be nuclei about this center which are themselves central. The essence may the more easily be grasped by its plural manifestations than taken by itself. There is an essence to life: a nucleus of factors without which life is impossible (biologists call it "organization"); a nucleus to understanding without which we could never think (some philosophers

* In the language of philosophers, this is a combination of what are called the *ontological* and *cosmological* arguments: *ontological* in the sense of being in the mind, *cosmological* in the sense of being put there by a causal agency. An effect must have an adequate cause. The effect of the ideas of the infinite and perfection must have a cause adequate: this is not man himself who is finite and imperfect but that Something which is in itself infinite and perfect, God.

For a fuller discussion, see Chapter IV, "Traditional Arguments For Belief in God" and Chapter V, "Contemporary Arguments for Belief in God," pp. 75–126, in my *First Chapters in Religious Philosophy* (1937).

call it "synthesis"); a nucleus to a home without which there would only be a house or dwelling; a nucleus to the great world otherwise it would not be as it is or keep going. We may strip off this and that and say that these are less or unessential; but there are some things we cannot strip off without annihilating the very thing itself.

We may live with our hair shorn to the scalp, with our toenails trimmed and our eye-brows plucked; we can live less easily without an ear or minus an eye or a leg; but there are some features we cannot get along without: our heart, our lung, the capacity to digest food. We may strip our thoughts of literary adornment, of fine phrases; we may less easily strip them of words; but to strip thought of consciousness or a self is to annihilate it. We can strip a house of wall-paper and door knobs and gadgets of all kinds; the house will be much less a house without a floor, a heating stove, windows and doors; but there are some features a house cannot do without: a roof, walls, beams, foundation, a parcel of ground or the support of a strong limb of a tree.

We may conceive of the world stripped of some of its features, such as evolutionary blind-alleys, vestigials of one kind or another, falling stars, volcanoes, glaciers, deserts, geological faults and upheavals; we may conceive of many animal and plant forms stripped from the face of the earth without harm to the ongoing processes of nature; we may even conceive of specimens of conscious human beings which might be dropped out of existence, hopeless criminals whom our forefathers classified among those possessed by "demons," without making any difference except a good one; we can *less easily* think of certain features of the world taken away, such as the rivers, marshes, hills, plains, many plants and animals, the behavior of conscious animals; but there are some things that cannot be taken away without destroying the whole uni-

versal order of things: temperature, chemical elements, laws (another name for order), food producing soil, the attraction and repulsion of heavenly bodies of which the earth is one, the sun,—and in the world of man, intelligence, capacity for adjustment, the recognition of the right, the better and the more true. Perhaps a consideration of these general essentials, this body of nuclei, will show the more central of these essences; perhaps they may be reduced to further quintessences. If so, that center of things, ground of things, the nucleus or center of nuclei is the thing that matters the most. We may call it by different names depending upon which function or aspect our attention at the moment is fixed; we may call it the First Principle, the Integrating Factor, the Supreme Energy, the Supreme Value, the *Élan Vital,* Destiny, Fate, Kismet, Creative Power, the Source, the Ground, the Determining Factor, the Infinite Wisdom—these are the symbols by which men have called *It.* Others call it, simply, God.

Suppose, it has been suggested, that our planet upon which we walk should be enfolded by a great mist during the day and at night this mist should be lifted so that we could see the starry sky. Suppose we study that sky at night, check up on the movements of the other planets and that we had no direct knowledge of the sun. The behavior of these planets would seem to point to some center. We would be ready to say that there is such a center though we cannot make it out. There is this imaginary focus which seems best to account for their movements. We call it the Sun. Now, it is highly likely that we should assign a place in the heavens to this imaginary Sun, one that corresponds to the sun we see by day. And this is what we do when we say that back and underneath this great Establishment of the Universe there is the appearance of this Something, a Nucleus with nuclei, which gives evi-

dence of governing and creating meaning to all this behavior. This is easy to believe. And it may be, when all is said and done, that no symbol will be more helpful to image this time-transcending and space-transcending Something than to call it by the familiar though capitalized concept of "Mind." And if this seems too abstract for us we shall add the more concrete imagery of Determiner of Destiny, the Lord of Lords; and if we think of the greatest minds we know as intelligent and good we shall go that step further and call this imaginary focus (which, indeed, may be as real as the sun), the intelligent and moral Governor, the great Companion, the Father of all. We shall then not have forgotten that when we talk of the world of things, this same world contains such manifestations as we: conscious beings with a moral nature and with hopes that reach as far as the stars themselves. If the heavenly bodies point to some sun, our own spirits also point to Something akin to ourselves; these pointings must somehow merge into some nucleus not too much unlike ourselves even though infinitely more.

Belief in God is not, however, a mere matter of a belief in such an *Existence* but it is much more a belief in the *character* of that Existence. I may still believe in a God but that God may well be the Devil. Men have never been satisfied with anything less about God than the best they know about themselves. Hence they speak of God in moral terms, with qualities which they could only desire to be permanently in the structure of things. The philosopher Kant had the right idea in these matters when he insisted that the real basis for such an enduring belief lay in the moral consciousness of men. There is, he said, a moral sense that is innate, a moral command which possesses us; and though we may have many intellectual difficulties about ourselves and the world, we can never escape the pounding of obligations in our moral na-

tures. "Oh, man, thou oughtest" thunders within ourselves; and he is dead who has lost the hearing of this thunder. We are, by it, compelled to believe certain things, even though, at times, we play with our skepticisms. Our nature places obligations upon us. We must say so and so about the world because we are forced by our moral sense so to say. We must say that there is a God. Why? Because this is the only way to make things come out morally right. We strive for higher ends; but the striving often brings with it rewards out of proportion. There must be somewhere a harmonizing principle to make marriage of moral striving with proper rewards. There must be a moral setting to moral striving; otherwise the moral sense is ridiculous and immorally begotten. Our moral sense requires that the Universe will not let us down. Without such a belief we have the morally insoluble enigma of being possessed by something that thunders away at us but which thunder is a hollow mockery.

This is undoubtedly why Jesus and others of the great religious prophets have caught the imagination of their followers. Not because of their reasoned considerations but because they have made out a moral cause for human existence—they have appealed to man where man is most touchy: his own feelings of justice and moral meaning. So far as Jesus was concerned —and in this he followed the Jewish line of prophets and is akin to the greater prophets of other great religions—nothing quite matters to man so much as this: that this Universe is fundamentally akin to his thundering sense of moral worth and moral meaning. All else for him seems to have followed from this.

If you look through your New Testament, that supremely impressive literary and religious document which contains so much that answers back to the human spirit that some men have said of it that it is inspired, that it is or contains the

very Word of God (I take the New Testament since for many readers of this book it is the one most familiar and toward which they have the strongest emotional response—but I do not, for one moment, suggest that other great religious literature can be thought to be lacking in a share to the claim to God's Word),—if you take the passages which report the direct teachings of the Teacher, you will find that nowhere did he leave behind him any clear-cut reason for believing in God. True, the injunction is: "Believe in God, believe also in me." But this is an invitation rather than a statement of persuasion. Why such a glaring omission on the part of a supreme religious Teacher of God? Surely, not because he lacked the faith; not because there were no doubters in his day; not because his method was characteristically dogmatic since he was given to much discourse; not because he laid down the requirement to those who would follow after him that they must become naive and indiscriminate disciples (the word, of course, means learners). Was it an oversight? But, why?—when so much was said for other religious ideas?

The truth of the matter is that he had the only really convincing statement that is religiously possible; but it is one that is subtle. It is this:

The most fundamental beliefs which we hold, the kind about which we are more convinced than skeptical, rest not upon any single consideration, any single argument, but, rather, upon a total impression. Any great idea resting upon a single base rests upon a precarious foundation. If you say that you like that fellow, you say something significant if this is the result of a series of contacts and impressions. To really know anything, you have to live with the object. It is a process of growth. Things that are most fundamental with us shape themselves over a series of experiences. A first im-

pression is never safe. To know and appreciate good music, you must grow into it. To come to knowledge that leads to wisdom, your experiences, appreciations, interpretations, impressions must merge into a kind of whole. You do not have a knowledge of painting by a superficial glance at this line as over against that, this color as against that, this configuration as over against that. You get it by a total impression which comes with a growing maturity. A natural scientist does not reach his conclusions by a single instance. No one is led into a profound belief in anything on the basis of an argument, however sound. It comes from an over-all picture after much brooding. Nowhere did Jesus claim allegiance upon the basis of a single episode. That, of course, was the incipient danger in the performance of miracle (which, according to the record he shunned); such performances have no depth, they belong to surface matters.

The same was true for that gallant missionary of the early church. Paul came to his convictions only after a long period of the incubation of his thoughts. He did not even take the resurrection story as significant until after he had come to terms with other considerations. He got first an over-all picture by the hard way of disbelief and in sharing in the persecution of believers; his vision on the road to Damascus had a long history back of it; his belief in the resurrection upon which he later gave emphasis was a corollary to what had come before. In this, he caught on to the way of him whom he chose to follow.

Our belief in God, if it is a religious belief (of concern to us) will come in the normal, natural way of things. It will come after the manner by which common folk along with the great artists, scientists, poets, religious leaders and thinkers, and all the rest come to possess their convictions—by a total impression of things upon which they brood—the over-

all picture of their experience and thought. Never has a person been convinced that there is a God by a single consideration; it comes, if it comes at all, by a total impression of the world, of life, and particularly, by the kind of person he finds by much experience he is meant to be in a world that takes on meaning in such a belief.

CHAPTER VIII

What is the Christian Church?

WE ARE TODAY witnessing a revived interest in the question "What is the Christian Church?" Churchmen in international gatherings are asking themselves this question anew, with special commissions appointed to give it fresh study. The magazines are full of articles in attempted answers to the query. For generations we have taken the church for granted. Today all institutions are under fire. The tide of modern thought has swept in to undermine unquestioned loyalties to the authority and claims of tradition. What is this thing called "the church?"

Let us first take a look at two opposing notions of what the Christian church is held to be.

First, there is the traditional view that the church is a divinely appointed order, having its roots in a specific commission of a Founder who is not only a son of man but the Son of God. It is the visible and distinct society of God's Spirit at work in the world to initiate and nurture men into that invisible and spiritual fellowship with God in appointed ways and by prescribed means. True, it contains members who are far from saints but members, nevertheless, dedicated to sainthood by a process of supernatural sanctification. It is set apart from the world and claims its rights independent of the world. It is of the essence a supernatural economy. Christ is the head; it is His body. Men are either in it or not. Inside of it there is definite assurance of eternal salvation;

outside of it there is no definite hope. The church is God's kingdom here and now, with frontiers well defined on earth and limitless in God's heaven. Submission and loyalty to it are the greatest of virtues. The church possesses the truth in religion and the means by which men may attain their highest goal: the salvation of their souls. To stand apart from its invitation is a risk which men ought not dare to undertake. To fall away from its favors is to court the condemnation of the Most High. Those who hold this view of the church are the Roman Catholics and, to a certain extent, certain conservative Protestants (e.g., high Episcopalians).

Secondly, in opposition to this supernatural theory is the naturalistic view that the church is a natural fellowship of those who are committed in a broad way to the ideals and spirit of the Master-Teacher of their religion. The church is held to be the expression of that social mind which can best articulate these ideals, each and every person being free to contribute his own experience and thought to that whole. All causes find their normal and most effective expression in a society. Organizations are natural products. The church is just another natural social economy. Organizations tend, of course, to be binding but they are, at heart, instruments for certain broad purposes. The church, on this view, has been referred to as the "gathered" church in opposition to the first which is the "authoritative" and "supernatural" theory. The naturalistic position is held by Christian humanists and by certain liberal Protestants.

Between these two theories there are a number of "middle positions." We may best see some of these in-between views by considering another concept which plays into the discussion of the nature of the Christian church. It is the concept of "the kingdom of God." The phrase "kingdom of God" is an expression occurring in the Scripture record of Jesus'

utterances some hundred times whereas the "church" appears only twice in that connection. What is the church in relation to this kingdom-concept? What is the kingdom concept? This question cannot be answered in a blanket way. Each group tends to define these concepts in its own way. A consideration of these terms in relation to each other will reveal the "middle positions" between the two major views above outlined.

The Roman Catholic view equates the church and the kingdom. The kingdom of God on earth is the church. The very ecclesiastical hierarchy of Roman orders suggests a regal society, from a literal head, the pope, the vicar of Christ, down through grades of royal orders to the lowliest of subjects. Outside this literal kingdom there is no promise of salvation. Its authority stands above any other. Wherever the church is, there is the kingdom. Such a church is not the result of natural forces but is the intrusion into the natural of the supernatural. To be united with the church is to participate organically in the supernatural blessings and promises of the kingdom. The sacraments, the teachings, the disciplines, the whole economy of the church are supernaturally grounded and men need only to submit and remain loyal to that order of things to be a part of the kingdom which has no end. The kingdom of God is not a metaphor. It is a real kingdom here on earth. It is the church. There is no democracy here; men do not elect a way to God; God reveals the way. Men may come and go but the church, the kingdom, remains. The kingdom was not made for man; man is called to it. The pope as a person is a sinful mortal like all the rest; but the pope is more than a person; his office elevates him above all. As pope he enjoys the highest place in the kingdom-economy on earth; he is the living representative of the authority of Christ. The basest of sinners may be members

of this kingdom upon the basis of conferred membership. One does not attain membership by being a saint. One has membership conferred upon him by virtue of the grace of God who has furnished a technique which lifts sinners into the sphere of grace. This technique is furnished by the church with its multitude of disciplines divinely sanctioned.

For the naturalists, the kingdom of God is no supernatural order. Nor is the church. The church is a social institution, the social mind at work. The individual may or may not join it, without risk, as he sees fit. If he unites with it, it is by an inner urge for high causes. His mind will remain free. He will not submit his intelligence nor his will without discrimination. His church represents his ideal and social-religious loyalties. The kingdom of God may be the church or it may not be. If it is the church it is not a literal kingdom. It is a spiritual and moral fellowship. If it is outside any social organization it is a social order in a different sense. It may be a companionship with others remote in time or space. It may be a union with those who protest against the rigidities of outward organizations. It may be the lonely reformer, lonely because society has ostracized him, but not lonely in the remembrance of others who have suffered for similar causes. God is not outside of nature. Nature reveals the Divine. All nature is of one weave. The kingdom is nature at its best. The church, if itself not the kingdom, is an instrument for creating it. It is one among other instruments. The ideals of Christ are not confined to any organization, to any one people, to any one creed; they know not of the limitations which men set up over against each other. The line between the church and the world is an unnatural line. The church is in the world and a part of it. So are sons of men. So are ideals. A super-natural order there may well be; but of what use is it to the sons of men if it is merely a super-

order? Men are here and now; they are of the earth and the earth is fundamentally the good earth. It is of no honor to the Deity to curse the products of the creative activity. True, the good earth is not a hundred percent good; but surely it is not a hundred percent bad as some supernaturalists, in their extreme enthusiasm, claim. There is nothing magical about religious exercises. What works in this world works according to fundamental laws. There are no special religious laws. God is in Nature at work. We share in that work not by decrying our birth-right but by assuming our rightful place in the scheme of things. The church at its best furnishes for us the ideals and the inspiration toward the fuller life; the kingdom consists of those ideals being achieved. We are not saved out of the world; salvation means to save sons of men in their travel through it. What lies ahead is another chapter; and it is a chapter continuous with what we accomplish here and now.

Now, for the "middle-views."

The Episcopalian conception of the church and its relation to the kingdom of God is very close to the Roman Catholic. It differs only in that its claims are less extreme. It accepts the view that the church is the divinely instituted order with a technique for man's beatitude and salvation. In the high Episcopalian church the kingdom of God approaches the Roman conception of being the church itself. But Episcopalianism in general (and particularly "low" Episcopalianism) tends to hold that the church is the concentrated effort to express the kingdom. It is itself not the kingdom in its entirety. It is rather the focal point, if a focal point there be, of that kingdom. The kingdom itself is larger than the focus. But the focus, if you went out to look for it, would be found where the Divine intrudes into the natural order by its Great Revealer, Jesus Christ, and by His disciples throughout the

ages. The sacramental emphasis of Episcopalianism is an expression of the focal point of the kingdom of God. It is the meeting place in a unique sense of the human and the Divine; or, to express it more carefully, the place where the Divine reaches down to men. If you want to join the kingdom you would join it where it can best express itself: the church. True, you may stand outside in the periphery somewhere. But why stand there when you might as well be at its earthly center? The Anglican or Episcopalian conception, in general, then, holds that the church is the *focal point* of the kingdom whereas the Catholic conception holds that it *is* the kingdom.

Another "middle" view is that held by many of the Protestant Reformed churches. As a concrete example we may mention the traditional Methodist conception. It is the view that the church is that group of Christian disciples which has been definitely saved out of a bedeviled world. It is that Christian group which has taken a definite stand for Christ and against the world. You are not of it unless you have been converted and born again. You will show signs of belonging. The world will spot you easily. The church is a visible thing in lives consecrated to Christ. The membership is not something ethereal and mystical. It is a known thing. Requirements of membership are severe: be ye perfect as is your Heavenly Father. The church is that "gathered" group which has taken a definite stand and, by the grace of God, produces sanctified lives according to the ideals and promises of its Head. The kingdom of God is not of this world; it is that better order, that "new earth" which will come in the fullness of time through the promises of Christ and to those who have allowed themselves to be surrendered to the Spirit. By their fruits ye shall know them. A regenerate man is different from the rest. He is living the life of the dedicated will. Those who share with him in this deliberate effort, by the

help of God, are members of Christ's church. The church has been made for man and not man for the church. The invitation of God's Son is clear; men may choose or not choose to accept. The sacraments are not so much mystical methods of union with the divine as they are means to mark and sustain the new life.

Another "middle" view, in antithesis to the Roman Catholic position, is the Lutheran. Whereas the Catholic holds that the church is the kingdom of God the Lutheran holds that the church on earth is one thing and the kingdom another. The visible church is defined in opposition to the Reformed conception (above) not as a body of members who reveal in their lives that entity but as that locus where God's revealed Word and the sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ are preached and dispensed in accordance with the will of the Most High. The church is visible by that criterion alone. There is, thus, a supernatural emphasis about it. Men may be sinners and still be members if they submit themselves to the preaching of the Word and participate in the holy ordinances. The sharp distinction between the church and the world lies not in the ethics of the one as over against the other. Even the best of ethics is bad. There is nothing good in man. The distinction lies rather in a technique of salvation: God's technique versus man's own sinful techniques. Man can of himself do nothing to attain favor in God's eyes. There is something greater than man's efforts in the world, offered by Christ. Man is a member of the visible church when he enters into the spirit and letter of that supernatural technique. Those who, by the grace of God, successfully attain membership, in the invisible or real church, are not known. The real church is known to God alone. Its members shall be revealed only at the Last Day. The kingdom of God is the real church, not the visible church. The visible church offers

the only way and the only assurance of the reality of the kingdom.

The above views may be placed together and then contrasted for the sake of making clear, in a general way, the problem of definition. The Roman Catholic, the high Episcopalian and, to some degree, the general Episcopalian views are committed to the position that the church is an end in itself. It is something which possesses intrinsic value; it is dependent upon nothing other than its own foundation, the supernatural; it merits loyalty, no matter what; it is *sui generis,* a unique meeting place of the divine and the human; it is a distinct society, separate from the world and separate from that which is best in solely human aspirations; it is supra-national; it is the body of Christ; it is above any social Utopia; it alone satisfies the nostalgia of the human soul to achieve its supernatural destiny; it is other than the world and resists by its inherent right any encroachments from the world. The kingdom of God is being uniquely expressed only through the church. The focal point of the church and that of the kingdom are the same point. The Lutheran view is a modification of this general view in its theory that the invisible church and the kingdom have the same focus.

The second general classification is that the church is an instrument for high ends. Here the visible church (Word and sacraments) of the Lutheran conception becomes a divine instrument for the kingdom. Here the church (as a group of regenerated people) for the orthodox Reformed becomes a divine instrument toward participation in the kingdom. Here the church of the social gospelers (those who emphasize Christianity as a means of social transformation of the world) becomes an instrument to transmute society. The kingdom of God, according to the "social gospel," is a redeemed social order. The church is a divine agency to bring

this about. Here the Christian humanists join hands in proclaiming that whatever else the church may be it is fundamentally functional, i.e., instrumental. Man was not made for the church; the church is and shall be for man. The kingdom is the result, the fruition of what the church may and does accomplish in concrete individual and social living.

All these theories of the church lay claim to some historical continuity; some rigidly so, some loosely so. The Christian church is not something that is a new birth for each generation, so it is held. It unfolds even as each generation unfolds. There are no breaks. There are changes. There is an ongoing process in which the old becomes new in appropriation and the new retains its inheritance. Whether the church is an end itself or a means to an end is the question that really divides all theories. Also, whether the church is fundamentally super-natural or whether it is natural divides theories sharply. Whether man is made for it or it is made for man, may be an antithesis too strongly put; nevertheless, the contrast between church and man is another fundamental contraposition which appears, by emphasis at least, in theories.

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Now that we have made this preliminary survey of some of the major views of the church, let us construct our own. The method we shall follow will be to keep in mind the general principle outlined in our first chapter, viz., beginning with the broadest kind of definition and then working up.

Most definitions of the church ("church" in general) are too narrow, or (shall we say?) too high up. They do not begin at the bottom. No discussion can profitably be undertaken unless we come to grips with terms and start at the very base. So, we begin by saying that whatever else the church is, it is

a natural economy. It has its being in the world of man. Whether or not it has an existence in some other sphere need not concern us at this point. At least it is a social phenomenon and operates under the laws of social psychology.

A church (in general) is first and last a religious expression. It is religion expressed. But it is more than that: an individual may be a religious expression but he is not a church. A church always involves more than a single individual. It involves at least a condition where there is a reciprocity of expression. Whatever this reciprocity may be on the Divine side, it involves that of human relations. Accordingly, at least two individuals are concerned before we have the religious phenomenon of the church. The church, then, becomes defined as a religion expressed in human associations. It may or may not be organized. It may or may not be formal. It may occur without buildings, constitutions and ceremonies. This basic conception is the church in a general sense. Thus, Mohammedans have their church; Jews have theirs; Christians have theirs; the primitive peoples have theirs; and so on.

But, what is the *Christian* church? The qualification "Christian" depends, of course, upon our conception of Christianity. This leads directly into two particular questions: the descriptive and the normative. In the one instance, the question is "What is or has been the Christian church?" The other: "What ought the church to be like?"

From the *descriptive* side the Christian church has *historically* been a variety of expressions. It has been highly organized and highly unorganized; it has been progressive and conservative; it has been committed to high religion and it has promoted some highly questionable ideals; it has been socially active and it has been socially indifferent; it has emphasized the supernatural at the expense of the natural

and, again, it has been humanistic in protest against otherworldliness.

When, in time, did the *historical* Christian church begin? This is a question that is answered by one's conception of Christianity. There are those who date the Christian church in terms of a certain New Testament declaration of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, there are those who date it prior to Jesus as having had its beginning in the ministry of the great Hebrew prophets. Jesus' ideals, according to this latter view, being in direct spiritual lineage with the prophets, cannot be dated. If we date the Christian church's beginning, we are committed to one theory of Christianity; if we do not date it we are committed to another. In the first instance, the historic Jesus is the emphasis; the church was "started" by Him. It is His creation. It did not exist before. He, an individual, is the cornerstone. In the other instance, it is not the historic Jesus alone that is the basis; it is, rather, Jesus as the representative or incarnation (if you will) of certain ideals. The Christian church, in this latter sense, does not date with a person but is known by the attempt to realize certain ideals. Before He was, those ideals were. He is, in some unique sense, the outstanding exponent of those ideals but his person is not the center; the ideals are the emphasis.

Historically, then, there are two ways of defining the church. First, the Christian church is the Christian religion expressed reciprocally by two or more persons dating back, in broken or unbroken continuity, to the Founder, Jesus Christ. Secondly, the Christian church is the Christian religion expressed reciprocally by two or more persons who are joined, in broken or unbroken historical continuity, to the valid religious ideals, wherever and however expressed, and as brilliantly exhibited by Jesus Christ. The latter interpretation is the one favored in this book.

The question whether or not the church possesses supernatural character is a question not confined to the nature of the church *as such.* It is rather a question of the nature or character of the Christian religion. Theories of the nature of the Christian church rest upon the prior view of whatever view is taken as to the nature of Christianity. In the briefest statement, the church, let us say, takes on the nature of what is fundamentally real (what some would call "the supernatural") only in so far as it reflects and achieves ideal qualities and ends.

We have, up to now, defined the church in the most general way. When most people, however, think of the Christian church they think of it in terms of some institutional expression. They think of the Presbyterian, or of the Lutheran or of the Christian Scientist, or of some denominational church. Institutional forms are particular expressions of the larger concept of the church. We shall devote the following two chapters to the institutional Christian church since it is in terms of its institutions that the Christian church has taken its most tangible form.

A word, in conclusion, however, should be added with reference to a *normative* definition of the Christian church. What ought the Christian church be like? The answer may well be put in a sentence as follows: the Christian church *ought* to express in a reciprocal manner in human relations, whether in close or broken continuity with what has gone before, those valid ideals which, in that continuity (and in harmony with the best in any religious tradition and experience), ought to be preserved. The ideal Christian church will express in social relations ideal Christianity.* The kingdom of God would thus be the ideal church of ideal Christianity.

* See pp. 92 ff.

CHAPTER IX

What about the Institutional Church?

WE HAVE SAID that a person's religion is to be distinguished from his *being religious.* To have a religion is to have a general perspective of things (about which we may be or are religious); to be religious is to be actually concerned, vitally and seriously, about that perspective. Now, of what does that perspective consist? How does one acquire it? Our beliefs, we have already suggested, are acquired in innumerable ways in the give and take of life. Reason and experience are the tools with which we build anew. Does this mean, then, that we build our total perspective all by ourselves, without recourse to outside help? By no means. We learn from others, we adopt from others, we imitate and appropriate.

By far and large, the religion we get is from tradition and custom. Most people never get beyond this. They remain uncritical, they fall into line. Many people get their religion (about which they are supposed to get religious) through some institution. They were sent to a Sunday School, a synagogue, parochial school and they were there taught the materials and forms of a certain traditional religion. They attend a catechetical class, "join a church," go to "services;" and their religion is made for them after tailor fashion. The institutional church is religion crystallized into certain organized forms of beliefs and practices. It may be an institution loosely organized, a community "unincorporated"; or it may

be highly mechanized. It alleges to present the deposit of the religious values from the years which have gone before.

Many people are today disgusted with the *institutional* church. Its faults and short-comings are being exposed as never before. Let us look at what hard-headed critics have been saying against the *institutional* church:

It has not taken a heroic stand on great and pressing questions at crucial times. Supposedly the great proclaimer and defender of the cause of peace, it becomes an easy prey to an agency of war propaganda. Throughout the years it has performed lip-service to those who are oppressed. Aligned with the capitalistic system, it has harbored rationalizations in behalf of that system. It lags on the great questions of social reform. Its preachers have mouthed platitudes; paid by a congregation that "calls" them, their tongues are constricted and paralyzed: the sermon is related to the salary check as a dutiful wife to her husband. Its religious education program was for years a farce; only lately has it tried, without too much success, to introduce the better pedagogical methods of the public school. It changed its program of education in hit and miss fashion: the Sunday School lesson leaves were superseded by new lesson leaves. Its religious educators were more pious than intelligent; its support of religious training schools for teachers has not brought the returns expected. The Bible schools are a travesty of the general intellectual climate. The machinery of the church is a typical political Tammany Hall with its ecclesiastical politicians more interested in getting and holding jobs than in the matters that are of real concern to the church. The sermons are for the most part trite and dry. The music may, at times, be good but better music is to be had right at home at the radio. The theology is antiquated. Men are trying to make-believe that the third, fourth and fifth or the sixteenth and seventeenth

century-thinkers are contemporaneous with our world. And they are not. The preachers quote the natural scientists *ad nauseam*; they have no authority in themselves. The authority of the Bible being under question in the old sense the preachers run hither and thither for some one to quote: poets, physicists, astronomers, novelists, and Mencken. A part of the world they are of the world. The church does not stand over against much that goes on. The members are just about on the same level as non-members as to the realization of the general human virtues. Sunday School children are not a whit more honest than those who roam the streets on Sunday mornings (as a recent careful study has shown). Churches compete with cut-throat methods. They could consolidate here and there but they are too stubborn. Lacking much to say they resort to rituals and Gothic architecture, gymnasiums and the best in kitchen equipment. The preacher must be a good slapper-on-the-backer. Young men are ordained who could not be ordained to anything else. The seminaries are hot-houses of a forgotten age. Church papers are propaganda sheets for administrative officers, a mutual admiration society of those in salaried and privileged positions, with an interspersion of columns of flat Sunday School moralisms, trite jokes, and advertisements of music stands, of book-marks-with-a-cross-and-a-tassel and of promotion cards-with-a-Moses-in-the-bullrushes. A minister with a fairly decent salary and free house and free potatoes (or at least 10% discount) preaches a mellow social reform to faces lined and hardened by the daily drudgery of eking out an existence. Prayers are said but no prayer for rain even though the meadows need it. Reservations abound and there is always the near touch of the line of hypocrisy. Collections are taken for the Lord and the purchases are made for stationary-with-embossed-letter-heads. So far, the critic.

All this, and much more, only reveals and makes stark bare the fact that the church is a very human institution. The sons of Adam move in and out of church doors, up and down the aisles, to and from pulpits, and back and forth before the altars.

Centuries ago a group of Christians disgusted with the church of that day decided to withdraw and form their own. The requirements were set so high that they found, after the first blush of the venture, that every member thereof had to be excommunicated. The church was left without any members! The whole question simmers down to the alternative: either a church, however good or bad, or no church at all. In this mundane sphere, *absolute* perfection belongs to the realm of the ideal, its realization to the imaginary realm of white-robed angels. Humans must get used to the thought that whatever is human is limited.

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What, then, can be said for the institutional church?

In the first place, being human * it is natural. It is as natural for religion to get expressed in organized relations as politics. In this sense, a church is no different from the local or national Republican party. Whenever or wherever people share like interests they will get together. It may be a Monday Club, the Rotarian Tuesday noons, the Boy Scouts, the Board of Trade, the Better Milk Association, the League of Nations, the National Association of Dunkers, the Quinn Relations' Summer Reunion Picnic Organization, Unincorporated. Officers there will be; committees, resolutions, executive cliques, the collection takers, the enthusiasts, the lag-

* The claim that the church is a divine institution is here neither denied nor affirmed. Like marriage it is human though it may become divine.

gards, the missionaries. In each of these unions there will be both good and not-good members; there will be the opportunists and the sincere; fundamentalists and liberals; the platformists and the non-conformists; and so on. Organized social ties of some kind are natural and human.

In the second place, any organization will not be on the same footing as any individual. Group opinion is not merely individuals plus individuals. The group will not, in other words, represent individuals as individuals. At best, it will represent general objectives, general principles to which individuals give their loyalty plus more specific objectives and more specific principles to which not all individuals will subscribe. These latter objectives will represent in fuller measure those who are on the inside, those to whom it falls to direct and give leadership. The institutional church reflects this same character. Probably almost all the members will give their assent to the broad principles and objectives of the particular church which holds their membership; but few members will agree that the more specific application of those principles and objectives represent them. I may agree with the broad purposes of the sermon and even of the preacher; but I will not always subscribe to what he says. He, as an individual, is expected to carry out the general objective of that organization (which will be the general ideals of a given religion); but this is not to say that he will cease thereby from being an individual himself. He, too, will have his own opinions from which I will dissent. Now, it is clear, that because I disagree with the members of the church board, or the minister, this will not invalidate the organization. I must keep in mind that they, too, are individuals. If, however, their program flouts the general objectives of the organization (which, indeed, may be rare) I no longer owe my allegiance to it; my objection to the institutional church is thus made valid. It is a fallacy in any social

enterprise that, if I disagree at all, I dissent throughout. Those who criticize the church often are guilty of an elementary blunder right at this very point. The organization is itself not an individual; it does not have the same outlook as the members save in the very broad objectives given to it by those who constitute its members.

In the third place, it is a truism that an organized group can accomplish what the individual, however ambitious, cannot effect by himself. I may feel that I know how a college ought to be run; but I am not a college nor shall I ever be one. I may start one; but to set up a college requires a group (for how could I carry on administrative correspondence, teach, perform janitor service, collect funds, be a student, etc.?) and wherever a group is there is a clash of opinions (even under cover); and whatever I undertake I will find myself involved with others and with the years that have gone before. Group expression will always have the potentialities of being stronger than an individual as such by the simple process of arithmetic. If I want my afternoon newspaper delivered to my door before supper, the chances of success are greatly increased if I can get my neighbors to act together with me to bring pressure upon the situation. If I want some social nuisance to be discontinued, I can more easily accomplish this end if I join with others who think along with me in this matter. Individuals, indeed, will carry the burden of initiative; but the results are more effective as one gathers support. No hospital was ever built, no capital ever accumulated, no newspaper ever flourished, without a group which sustained it. Moreover, the individual as such is an abstraction since he is always a member of some social order. This truism needs no elaboration. The institutional church is a possibility of the realization of objectives beyond the abilities of a single individual as is any other social unit.

Though it may fail here, and may fail there, it still has potentialities for power which the individual as such cannot bring to bear.

In the fourth place, the institutional church, like any other group in so far as it remains true to its broad objectives and principles (to which the individual has given allegiance), acts as a stimulant to the lethargy which creeps like paralysis over people at times. In a day of vibrant mood, I may be all excited over some good purpose; but the day is surely coming when I shall not be as excited as I ought over the same high purpose. When I am in such a low frame of mind the chances are that others may be at peak; a contact with their enthusiasm may bring me back to where I ought to be. The stimulation of other minds is also a truism. I may read the day's lesson by myself; but the contact with the class which is reading the same lesson will bring out things I never dreamed of. What else is a class for? If the teacher does not stimulate, why should he sit up front? Moreover, when I am at low scholastic ebb I will find by the contagion of enthusiasm in others the tonic I need to carry on toward high ends. An institutional church is just such a center of stimulation (unless it is dying or dead) for tired spirits; an instrument to carry him across his depressions.

In the fifth place, the institutional church represents a tradition. To some, this may mean merely retrogression and stagnation. But this is a mistake of the first order. Tradition is the mother teacher of much wisdom. In the lap of the ages are found the glories and mistakes of the past. There is something profoundly moving when I meditate upon the thought that what I am doing has been done for ages and ages.

I once had conversation with an Episcopal minister of very high standing in his ecclesiastical circles who told me of his life-long wrestling with skepticism. It was difficult for him

to believe what he thought he ought to believe. He had been a minister in a certain denomination for some years. When World War I came and he saw how little concerned his church was over the moral questions involved in that war he became convinced that the church was just so much baggage handed down and to be handed down. The call to the life heroic seemed to come from outside the church rather than from within. He left his ministry and his church and with tongue in his cheek about ultimate questions he took up the cause for his fellow-men who had become embroiled in what he termed a nonsensical struggle. I shall not discuss his wanderings and his utter despondency. One day, he said, he happened to go into an Episcopal church. He picked up a hymn book and with the congregation singing he joined in with mumbling the words. Of a sudden, he said, it came to him that the words themselves did not mean much nor did the particular minister nor the particular choir nor the particular people who were present; but—he felt the presence of a tradition, a host of those who throughout the ages had knelt and sung and sat together. It was as if a huge wave had swept in from the deep and lifted him above all his petty skepticisms. He felt he belonged to the ages, that he was no different from the countless, the great throng, who once had hoped and aspired though they had floundered and failed. It was like the music coming not from a single violin or bassoon but the sweep of a symphony. Millions and millions have gone before; they had come together in their feeble manner of worship; they had undoubtedly been mistaken in much;—but there was in this communion of "saints" a residuum of power and hope and aspiration and hunger and ideals which, if it did not satisfy intellectual difficulties, did stir his emotions to a new pitch. He went on to say that he now finds the celebration of communion the strongest impulse to high liv-

ing incomparable to anything else in that whole tradition. For communion is the symbol of a struggling mass of humanity, a togetherness in spirit, and of the very great possibility of the presence of a host of accompanying witnesses.

Now, we may not share the same reactions as this individual; but it is true that when we see others in the greatness of faith doing the things that have been done throughout the ages, we do get the feeling of our own pettiness, our own limited perspective, and catch something of the thrill of the spirit which makes men keep before themselves their ideals however far they walk from them. Tradition is a power. The ancient ceremonies of the coronation of a king are moving not because they contain clean-cut intellectual ideas or understandable symbols (e.g., a coach drawn by horses in an automobile age!) but because through them a hoary past and a brief and remote present are wrapped into an impressive unity. The long centuries made present mean much!

Any cult of the contemporaneous is thin and vapid. I can learn by studying the development of Greek thought more lessons about man and the good life in one day than I could perhaps learn in a life-time by fussing with myself. Moreover, it gives me a thrill to know that Plato was bothered with the things that now bother me; it makes Plato a relative of mine and I get the feeling that we belong together. Though I possess the perspective of a century that he was not fortunate to have, yet will I find that he had a perspective in his day I shall never be able to share. I find in him the kind of mind that reaches over the centuries and still a teacher to my day and generation. The masses may be wrong about many things; but there is something compelling about the masses which hunger and hope, which, though they continue to stumble in their path, pick themselves up and continue their stride. The church as an institution—like all institutions—

tends to conserve values which a passing age may fail to appreciate.

In the sixth place, an organized church group should bring us into contact with religious specialists who can kindle religious interests and fan them into a living reality. Most of us live, from day to day, a rather monotonous and drab existence. We come home after having punched some clock or met with a series of conferences or fed some machine. The only integration (to use a much worn out rag-term) we get is that centered in our little sphere of interest. We have little or no time to get a broad perspective of things. We may read; but most of us do not have the time or the inclination or the patience to do the kind of reading which will give it. We need a tonic; a broad perspective. Now, the institutional church should present the services of a skilled dispenser of broad perspectives: one as skilled at such a thing as some of us are in making change or putting on rubber heels. We go to a dentist when we need dental services; we go to a lawyer when we need legal advice; we go to a school when we feel the need of specific training. Why is it not reasonable to think that we should go to the institution of a church to get the broader perspective of life which is so fundamental for our general well being? An organized church is, presumably, an answer to such need. We shall always have those people who specialize in the bird's eye view of life and they have a true function to perform. Had this need not been met in some measure, the institutional form of religion would have perished with the fads and fancies of the ages.

In the seventh place, we need to get out of ourselves even for a brief while during the week. Psychologists are now telling us that many people today are suffering mental ills and a general feeling-tone of unhappiness because they are introverts; they ponder too much on their plight, they are too much

concerned about themselves. We need to stand outside of ourselves, check up with others and, above all, transfigure ourselves. Dr. H. C. Link in his popular little book, *The Return to Religion* (1936), says that he has found it good to go to church for the apparently paradoxical reason that he prefers to stay at home; that he allows himself to be put on committees because he hates them. By making one's self do the things one does not like, one detaches himself from himself; by doing something, one is relieved of the strain of self-consciousness and the troubles which drag us down. It is also the principle of so much modern educational technique: one learns by doing. Any position which one takes can be doubted in thought and doubted for good reasons; one learns which view of views to take not by adding up arguments *pro* and *con* but by trying them out, by doing something about them. The more we can get beyond ourselves, the more full and round and pleasurable life will be for us. It is a common experience (as most of us can testify) that when sorrow comes we can bear it much easier by getting busy with something. The more busy we are, the lighter the pain. To sit and ponder, to isolate ourselves, is ruinous to our mental and physical health. We must get out. We must take part in something. We must become extroverted. This paradox has no better statement than the one found in the New Testament: He that loses his life shall find it. The institutional church offers the opportunity to help one forget oneself; not, however, by merely sitting and listening to someone talk about our "inner lives" but by calling us to service in whatever menial a task. In this respect the organized church stands on the same level as a club, a game, a contest. But it has the added feature: that what we shall be doing will be consciously connected with some view, some task, that reaches out beyond a little present, something (as it is alleged) that

carries a meaning which goes far beyond our limited horizons.

We are told that to have fun we must know *how* to have fun. A fun without perspective fades. That which carries the fun on is the kind which is disciplined. How well we know what a job it is for many boys to have fun on a rainy Saturday. They play with this a while and play with that a while; soon each effort to have fun ends in fret and frown. If the boys had a task to perform which was easy enough at the start to call out the play response and that task continued to call for their efforts, the fun would likely endure. To play with a tin soldier bought at the Five and Ten may be fun for a while; but to build a clubhouse out of old lumber makes for fun that increases at each level of progress. The institutional church is not there to offer a passing entertainment; it may offer in dramatic form as difficult and as worthy a task as is consonant with a person's ability to perform, in a setting which has the very great possibility of offering the more lasting pleasurable satisfactions to anyone as he identifies himself with something big outside of himself. From pouring coffee at a ladies' benefit, teaching ideals to nine-year-olds, to world-wide missionary work, there are tasks which somebody may do which, perhaps, ought to be done. The recompense may be in high coin: an incomparable compensation that comes from a release from the monotonous companionship with one's own burdensome self.

There are other considerations in favor of the institutional church, some of which belong higher up on the ladder of a religious faith. Some such considerations require discussion at more length than here could be given. For example, corporate worship is a specific function and art of the institutional church—a public expression of the worth and value of the highest religious commitment, the stimulation toward highest ends and an act of reverence for those things con-

sidered Divine. The institutional church should furnish, whatever else, the inspiration to keep alive the sense of reverence and the renewed pledge of loyalty to the Divine (which is worship, both public and private), not because Divinity in itself seeks recognition or placation but because only by such an attitude and commitment are the higher religious values nourished and conserved.

CHAPTER X

But—Which Institutional Church?

MANY OF US have been brought up in some church household. We were born into an organized church. Some of us were baptized into it, sent to Sunday School, confirmed in it. It was not a matter of choice so much as it was a matter of heritage. Some of us learned to look with raised eyebrows on those who were born into another church circle. It was pointed out to us how mistaken others were in some of their beliefs and practices. We were made to believe that we were the elect of the Lord.

It is a mistake to continue allegiance to a given church when that church no longer represents our preference or meets our needs. Many people feeling the sense of loyalty to the church of their fathers and, finding that their church fails to stimulate them as it ought, stand apart, choose none instead of some other. This may be a misfortune. They come to believe that they are not material for any religious association. And they may even rationalize themselves into believing that they are quite different from their fathers in that they are not religious.

It is no longer a disgrace that if my parents are of the Republican party I join with the Democrats or with a third party. It is no longer an act of disloyalty if I prefer another college to the Alma Mater of my parents. College officials who do field or contact work know only too well that they must not depend upon the children of the alumni to have the

same feeling for their college as do the graduates. It is no longer an act of ingratitude if the boy chooses to be an undertaker and not follow up his father's hardware business. We are not expected to prefer the same songs which suited the suitors of yesterday; we are not expected to wear the same kind of cut in our clothes; we are not supposed to be disgraced if we prefer to dance rather than to chew tobacco. When an organized church gives its best to a child and the child decides later to join another, we hear it said "*that* is gratitude for you!" But such a word from a church is a sign of its having gone to seed. If the motive of an organized church is to increase *itself* rather than promote the end for which it stands, that church has lost its true function. For a religious organization is an instrument for religion and not for the organization. It always *represents* something; *introduces* something; *means something else.* If a person can find himself better served, at a more mature level, by another religious organization and if he still tries to follow the high ends to which any church ought to be dedicated, there is no reason on earth, except a false sense of values, why his mother-church should not extend its blessing and its felicitations.

Not every institutional church meets everyone's needs. A church represents a cultural level. Some people will want an environment which satisfies minds that are sensitive to doubts; other environments will serve those best who care to think the least. Levels of culture run all the way up and all the way down the scale; and the churches reflect all this.

It is now a rather accepted practice, even among the most conservative religious groups, to try to meet the needs of different groups *within* a church by a service suited for such groups. Children are given a type suited to their level; the "intermediates," a special type; the young people, a special type; adults, a special type. Not all are expected to be served

in the same way by the one form of service. Why should not the same principle hold on the horizontal plane (across church lines) as well as on the vertical (within an organization)? If we must have a certain form to meet a certain type *within* a given organization, should we not expect to have that same principle at work outside the organization? The answer here is very plain: that, indeed, is what has happened all through the history of the Christian church.

The variety of denominations is not an accident. Variety is as normal as it is human and natural. Men have believed that the real causes which divided them were intellectual; we are coming to see that cultural patterns and not theological differences are the basic causes for divisions. There is a strong movement today to bring the organized churches together into some kind of unity. The rivalry between Protestant groups, for example, is a scandal, so it is said. And it is true that the churches have, for the most part, been more interested in self-perpetuation than in the promulgation of the cause for which they stand. No church today can well afford to go back to the unethical practices of competition which unfortunately characterized so much of its technique even a generation ago. How well some of us remember how excited our Lutheran church got when they heard that the Methodists were to build in one of the new suburbs of the city! We must begin a mission immediately and in the spirit of Woolworth's put up a store across from the Kresge's. Our fathers tell of the upturned noses of those who passed each other to go to their several rival houses of worship. Any American city or hamlet will give objective witness of the result of this competition: more church buildings than most cities can afford; huddled together, on one corner, is the Lutheran, across the street the Methodist, down the block the Baptist, across that street the Reformed, and around the corner the Episcopalian. The irony

of it all is made more visible in the smaller hamlet which boasts of but one street, a scattering here and there of homes, and two or three, sometimes four or five church buildings huddled together—buildings whose barn-like architecture reveals struggling poverty increased by provincialisms. The depression of some years ago made clear to some muddled heads the futility of much of this type of competition; the automobile and radio are doing their full share to change the ways of the older saints.

But many of those who plead the cause of church unity forget a very elementary lesson: *viz.*, that back of this variety lies a principle in the nature of human beings: they are different. It would be a pity if we must have but one institutional church; we should then be robbed of our preference for there would be none. Institutional church unity which threatens variety will end only in new divisions. It has always been so; and so long as humans differ there will be this natural cause for diversity. It would be a pity if I had only the Four Square Gospel church in my city; and of equal pity if the Four Square Gospelers had only the high Episcopalian. (Imagine, if you can, in your city a sort of gigantic Montgomery-Ward type of church—a subsidiary to a main office—the only church available for all types and tastes!)

What will bring the organized churches together will be the natural merging of cultural slants and not machinery, however well organized. Lutherans * and Unitarians in this country, for example, have shown no inclination to unite. Why? For the *fundamental* reason that the cultural patterns of those who find themselves in these groups have been, for the most part, conspicuously different. The Lutheran church in America has been, by and large, a middle-class church and of immediate middle-class European setting. In the middle

* Lutherans, of course, accentuate the *theological* as the basis of difference.

of the last century hordes of Germans and later Swedes and Norwegians came to this country. They found, when they came, that the pioneering labor had already been under way along the seaboard; the pioneering spirit which was in their blood found more promising outlet in the lands which were still open towards the west and northwest; and this meant plowing, cutting timber and working in the centers of distribution and in the factories which had already begun their operations. It is no accident that the northwest became the mecca for so many of the hardy and conservative Scandinavians. Their children are now amalgamated with the children of the other newcomers. This process will, in time, change the complexion of the Lutheran church in America as surely as it has every church all down through the ages. The Unitarians represent the more leisured class: those with ancestors who were lucky enough to be here earlier and for whom the economic opportunities across the sea as well as here made for a broader education and a different type of culture. More and more, the Unitarians are seen to have been pioneers in much of the process of liberalizing the Protestant churches. It is a far cry, culturally speaking, between a New England Unitarian Church and a prairie-state Lutheran community. In many of the traditionally conservative churches one now hears a Unitarian preacher though he wears the Presbyterian or even the Episcopal name.

A few years ago a study was made of the relation of men of scientific eminence and church membership. Only twenty-five percent of the highly selected lists studied reported membership in a church. Of this group it was found that the liberal denominations "provided" many more eminent research men than did the conservatives. The Unitarians and the Congregationalists topped the percentage list of eminent men with relatively low percentages from among the Catho-

lics, Lutherans and Baptists.* Though a number of interpretations may be offered to explain the net results of this study, there is one plain fact that underlies the figures: a church does not "provide" (as the authors of that study put it) men of scientific eminence but a church *reflects* the cultural pattern of those who make up its membership. That seventy-five percent did not report any membership may have more than one explanation; but that certain churches have a relatively higher percentage than others of men of scientific eminence is but evidence of the fact of cultural differences. The years will bring changes here (the changes are now going on with swift speed—witnessed in the most traditionally conservative churches) as they have throughout human history: the percentage lists will change with reference to the churches, with the changing cultural patterns. All this is to say, not that one church is better than another; but rather, one is different in cultural complexion from another.

If it is reasonable to suppose that one's religion should get expressed in some organized group (which was the burden of the preceding chapter), our question then remains: which group? The answer is very simple. One will choose that group which best stimulates one to bring into realization and to life the ideals about which one should concern oneself. One may find his best stimulus in Roman Catholicism. Many intellectually tired souls find today their stimulation in the highly symbolic and ritualistic forms of religious practices. Lacking any ground for authority and seeking some solid rock upon which to rest, the authoritarian mode of the Roman Catholic church (which is none too strict as to laymen) is appealing. The smell of incense, the procession of choir boys, the candles at the altar, the strange language of the priest, the weird

* "Scientific Eminence and Church Membership," by H. C. Lehman and Paul A. Witty in *The Scientific Monthly*, December, 1931.

chants from the choir, the gothic appeal to the transcendental —all have great psychological appeal. There are others who will not feel that they are getting "value received" without a strong emotional appeal to surrender, to testify, to shout their approval; we shall always have the religious "whooper-uppers" as long as people are culturally that way. There will be some who will find in the YMCA or the Brotherhood Class the thing which makes appeal: the pep talks from a successful man on Main Street, the informal good fellowship of a men's Bible class, the luster of "I am so pleased to meet you" and the friendly hand-shake. That, too, is a church founded upon the churches. Again, there will be those who will religiously save their Friday nights (or whatever the nights are) to parade before the Elk of Elks, or the Thirty-Second-Degreer in dazzling costume and plumed hat. The feeling of belonging to something exclusive and yet humanitarian and yet God-fearing will continue to have its appeal to some at that cultural level.

It is interesting to review in mind the form of religious organization in primitive Christianity. Jesus, it is certain, did not find in the forms of his day the fullest satisfaction which he craved. The Jewish church was a highly organized affair, with festivals, days of fasting and special supplication, professional priests, rites of purification and sacrifice, a sacred literature, appointed officials, a special house for instruction (synagogue), special forms of religious education (learning of the Psalms, Sabbath observances, etc.), parades, temples. Although he did not ridicule the church organization of his day, he moved out beyond it. Among the lilies of the field, on the grass and rocks along the hillside, in the alley-streets of suburban Jerusalem, under the shadows of cypress trees, by the waters of the Jordan and Galilee, at the home of Zacchaeus —what a variety of background for his meeting-house. So

far as we know, there was no hard and fast organization; not even a constitution or a set of by-laws, not even the closed circle of a professional priesthood. The organizations came later with necessity. Lines of demarcation were drawn as they are drawn in political and cultural developments. But primitive Christianity itself hardly had a church after the pattern of the ecclesiastical households of later and modern times. There must have been a quiet recognition of the differences in human temperament and the resolution that no forms would stand in the way of the things that mattered most to him. It was religion that concerned him: a certain *kind* of religion. Any organization is but the servant and not the master.*

* * * *

This writer holds the seemingly anomalous position of having membership in two Protestant denominations (true, one membership "affiliate"). A few years ago this would hardly have been thought of, to say nothing of its being permitted. In one generation we are moving fast in religious transition. I do not expect that the two denominations to which I belong will join hands in a unity in any *near* future. As I reflect upon the cultures which lie behind both, I sense that certain distinctions have not, as yet, been overcome in the days of transition. From the one side, comes my background, the organized church into which I was born and bred. On the other side, come circumstances of position, environment, and a more satisfying cultural pattern. I do not for one moment suggest that one church is better than the other; I only say that they are different. The church papers

* Scholars today are telling us that Jesus shared with his contemporaries the view that the end of a dispensation was at hand and thus he did not visualize the need for an organization to carry on for ages to come.

coming from each of these groups are different (though the second church has more than one such journal). The attitude of the one remains traditional in emphasis; the general attitude of the other leans more on the prophetic side. My mind happens, by interest and training, to be on the side of those who like to strike out for newer insights rather than with those who, in general, are content with the theology and practices of the fathers. I acknowledge frankly the sentimental ties which still bind me to the one and the deepening sentiment for a view that is larger than either or both.

Many of us have had such backgrounds. We have experienced transition if not conversion. Probably it is not too much to say that we have grown in grace and in stature. At least, we believe this to be so. Some will say that we have fallen from grace! But we are not concerned about what people think of us but what matters most to us. It is fitting that, since this chapter asks a very specific question, we attempt a very specific answer. I shall set up some ideals which I think an ideal church should possess—the church satisfactory to some minds in transition. Mind you, I do not think we shall have such a church in any universal sense. It is better that we do not, for, as we have said, there are varieties of human experiences. What I have in mind is the kind of institutional church which perhaps those who have been through the great transition would favor, one which may express the ideals that are a part of the religion discussed earlier.

* * * *

Let us take a look at such a hypothetical church.

In many respects it would be like the churches of yesterday. There will, of course, be the humanitarian interests, both near and far. There will be some form of religious instruction

for the young. The Bible is a literature which, whatever one may think as to its inspiration, is a part of our Western culture. Not to know the familiar stories, the parables, the anecdotes of Jesus' ministry, his great teachings, and the interpretations of him by the New Testament interpreters, is to be cut off from understanding and appreciation of the background of much in our present culture. There are religious insights and moral precepts which have the flavor of the eternal; certainly they have persisted with the passing of time and place and perspectives. There will, of course, be the services of worship; and there will be the board of administrators and the gatherings of like-minded in specific endeavors. There will be fraternization with others (other religious groups) who hold the same ideals of religion, cooperative functions both civic and world wide. But a number of more specific changes occur to this purview.

There should be adequate support of two ministers. Both of these men (and I exclude the women) should be highly qualified both by training, by high commitment, by temperament and gifts, to lead in the two functions generally expected in one man. I refer to the preaching and the pastoral functions. The two qualifications are seldom, if ever, found in one and the same person. One should not be the assistant to the other, the "flunky" as the assistant pastor often becomes. Each will be directly responsible to the democratic organization which has chosen them. A word about each.

We need in this day, more than ever, good preachers. There are very few of them. I can count on the ten fingers of both hands all the good preachers in this country who really stimulate me; and on the fingers of one hand those to whom I would go across the country to hear. (Many ministers themselves would confirm this!) America is producing few really great preachers. It is impossible to preach with prophetic

vigor and insight in a day so complex as ours when ministers are expected to run about hither and yon, as do thousands of them, to all sorts of trivial affairs during the week. The minister walking frantically to and fro in his Saturday night study is a travesty upon a system which makes demands and gives little consideration for them. The preacher will not be the usual type who when he "orates" lowers his voice to a basso (although he naturally is a second tenor), drawing upon his voice as one pulls the tremolo-stop in the parlor reed-organ. He will not smell of the elocution department of his college or seminary which emphasizes the commas, colons, dots and dashes and which enunciates meticulously "roh-sees ah reyd"; nor will he necessarily wear a morning coat with striped trousers, and curl up the ends of his hair; nor will he be an actor depicting some Greek tragedy where there is none. He will be as the Lord has made him: a second tenor, a talker rather than a pulpiteer, a human being wearing the clothes that become his body. He will not give his "best sermon"; he will not sermonize at all. He will just talk. We shall call his discourse a lecture, full and round, and informing, with the flavor of the prophetic. Undergirding his presentation there will be a motivation to things better and higher; but it will be a motivation that will be subtle and not conspicuous. We shall treat him as a person uninspired. We shall think of him as one who gives testimony of what "seems to him." We shall no longer expect an oracle. If he tends to reveal a consciousness of looking down from some Mt. Olympus we shall harden our hearts against him. We shall expect him to say things we do not believe or want to believe. We shall give him the freedom which some of our colleges still give their professors as specialists in their field. He may propagandize; but such propagandizing will be tempered by the wisdom which comes from wide reading and the years.

He will be over forty; not because life begins then but because we shall want a modicum of maturity. He can be as old as eighty-nine(!) if he is alive to his day. We shall expect him to be his own authority and not a purveyor of whatever authority in whatever field. He will first and last speak in his own field; and in that field much shall be required of him. He will have a love for theology and philosophy, for those disciplines are basic in the matter of large interpretations. He will have his ears to the ground and know something of the great and pressing questions affecting the lives of human beings. We shall not, however, ask of him how we shall vote; whether the Republican party has a more strategic platform and more worthy candidates; we shall not expect him to be an economist, an international diplomat, or a social druggist, or a poet and "literary" man, or a Communist, or an astronomer, or a state-senator. We shall expect him to speak prophetically *in the things of religion,* first, last, and throughout. He will give us livable patterns and steady us with their reasonableness; he will point the way to far distant horizons and keep before us the things that in the long run shall matter the most for us and our children. And he will reveal his humility not by words but in the graces of a gentleman sincere, open-minded and lovable.

His partner will be an expert in the many details of life's adventure. He will know something of the art of solace in grief, something of the psychology of despair, the mistakes that men make. He will be one of those rare souls which experience has tried and found of true gold. He shall by no means be the antithesis of the preacher; but we shall not expect of him what we shall expect of the man in the pulpit. It is said that the man must know his people before he can preach. This is most certainly true. A really good preacher will probably have come from the honorable rank of pastor.

The discipline of preaching comes not only by the quiet of the study but with an ear to the pavement. But—we shall learn to temper our *demands* on each according to the position to which each has been entrusted. Both ministers we shall regard as equals but in special responsibilities.* The one will be an expert in the confessional and, if he is, we shall soon find ourselves seeking his advice and entrusting our confidences—circumstances and times which are so frequent in the lives of all of us.

The church will have its form of worship. But it will be without the embroidery of the near-comic. It will not try to compete with the city opera house or the county fair. We shall have music but not a display of sonatas and oratorios. We shall expect to be greeted if we feel so inclined; but we shall have exits with green lights through which we may be certain of retiring unmolested by those semi-professionals who block the exits with remarks about the weather and the invitations to come again. For those who like to be greeted, there will be opportunity in a more informal manner. The announcements shall be printed but we shall emphasize our religion and not the men who dispense it.

The church will have a forum where causes may be presented and where other specialists will share their information. We shall not call it a "men's Bible Class" where the Bible is but a name appended and the he-man approach accentuated. To this forum (of both sexes) the town mayor may come and present causes worthy of community interests; the communist will have a chance to air his troubles; the statesenator may speak of impending legislation which concerns long-range views; experts in whatever field relating to the

* Lest it be thought that the suggestion of two ministers is highly impracticable, it may be pointed out that in many colleges today the practice is gaining ground. We have student pastors and college preachers and we are learning to measure our demands differently upon them.

concerns of a valid religion will be given an opportunity to be questioned. No salesman will be tolerated. This class will be presided over by anyone except the ministers; the ministers themselves will learn to sit in the pews and listen with patience alongside the rest of humanity and it will be a good place to get the kind of perspective which they need from time to time.

We shall not allow the local contractor to haul sand into the Sunday School rooms or the local department store to install permanent hobby horses and bassinettes. The Sunday School will reflect a return to religion and will be presided over by a director who has had qualified training. He will come from a university which does not reflect all the recent tommy-rot of so-called "religious education"; his bachelor's or master's degree (if he has one) will be a *bona fide* degree from a respected institution. He will not run his organization in competition with the church but as a station along the way toward religious maturity.

The church will have an administrator who is not a minister. He will be salaried as are the organist and choir leader. The details of business administration he assumes will relieve the religious specialists to concentrate upon that which is expected of them. He will manage the financial affairs of the organization and be accountable to it: a kind of city manager who carries out the detailed work of those who have the responsibility of management. He will make the announcements about special financial needs and carry on the correspondence with salesmen of bulletin-boards, lawn mowers, altar candles, wines, and church envelopes. A budget there will be which will not require church bazaars and quilting parties. (This does not exclude social functions, such as dinners, which are means of deepening friendships.) A part of the budget will include a fund which will make it possible to

have visits from other contemporary religious prophets; for no prophet, however good, can remain prophetic from Sunday to Sunday in his own pulpit.

The hymns of the church will be revised from time to time to fit the changing ideology. The tune of "Onward Christian Soldiers" may be retained with other words; the tune of "Jerusalem the Golden" may incorporate some new ideas. It shall be recognized that words about Deity are symbolic and that poetry will continue to have its place. Many of the hymns of most hymn-books may well be excluded without a sense of loss; they are no longer sacred to an age which is a stranger to their symbols. Hymns should move on the plane of "reality feeling." *

Each Sunday, there will be a time set for a Quaker type of service. It will be brief and will center about meditation. The organist may have a part but he will not wear the worshippers down with sad and "touchy" music. Probably little will be said; what will make psychological appeal in a brief quiet type of worship will be that which touches the senses of sight and smell and taste (communion is effective right at this point) rather than that of hearing. It will be a service where the auditory sense-organs will be stimulated only incidentally and brevity a particular attraction to the participant.

. . . This kind of church may not be found in one institution. If not, we may find it to advantage, in a day of transition, to attend the services and even, perhaps, to hold membership in more than one communion. Why should one not be an attendant and a member of more than one church, even as one is a member of more than one society? Perhaps in these days we may have to become "spiritual tramps" in order to satisfy the kind of temperament which nature and experience have given us. At least, there should be no scorn thrown upon

* See p. 20.

the one who is trying to find for himself the kind of stimulation which leads on and up and beyond. Let variety continue; but with that variety let there be mingled the graces of understanding and sympathy and charity. Perhaps the day will come, and may not be too far off, when the organic relations of Protestant groups will make it possible for one to be a "spiritual tramp" without stigma or any suggestion of disapprobation.

CHAPTER XI

A Soliloquy on Prayer

PROFESSOR WILLIAM JAMES, the eminent philosopher at Harvard years ago, was a keen observer of human psychology. Most of us, he insisted, are torn personalities. At one time we are cowards; at another, heroes; at one time, skeptics, at another, believers. Our lives flow unevenly. (The more recent way in referring to this characteristic behavior is to speak of "cycles" or "rhythmic alterations.") For some of us the skeptic in us wins over the believer; for others, the believer wins over the skeptic.

Let us imagine, if you will, a torn personality wrestling with the question of prayer. Leaving out the psychological considerations, let us consider the kind of arguments he offers to himself as he views now one set of considerations and now another. The problem here is: Is there anything, *really*, to prayer?

Scene I. In Which the Skeptic Wins over the Believer.

Says the skeptic in me: I cannot believe in prayer. Here are my reasons:

1. I have experienced the fact of unanswered prayer.
2. There is a flagrant inconsistency involved: prayer, if answered, involves a break with natural laws and this is an orderly world.

3. Who am I that Deity should pay any attention to my little whims and fancies? It is preposterous to ask the presiding officer of this gigantic establishment, this Universe, to fix things up for me.
4. Some people claim answers to prayer. But, can we not account for their alleged answers in other ways? They are mistaken. There are a thousand explanations to anything. They fail to consider other interpretations.

These skeptical considerations would seem to settle the question in favor of the negative.

But—there is another side to me. I am not a hundred percent skeptic. No one is. There are times when I feel myself on the side of the angels. I have a thousand beliefs and hopes. Too many people, like my *other* self, have lived on the side of the positive. Millions have prayed; millions continue to pray. Can they all be under an illusion? Says the believer in me: I really covet a belief in prayer; frankly, there is a wish, perhaps secret and unexpressed, that there might be something to it. But—how can the skeptic in me be sufficiently quieted so that the believer in me may have a chance?

. . . I have it! I shall go to different people and ask them what *they* may have to offer to satisfy my more positive nature.

Says Person A: Sir, the easiest way to meet the difficulty is to forget it. The question is unimportant anyway.

To which advice I mutter to myself: This is a solution; but not for me! The believer in me will not let me go. The thing isn't so easily sloughed off.

Says Person B: My friend, get over the idea that prayer means asking for something. Think, rather, that prayer means fellowship—an intimate communion with your Maker. Pay your respects to Deity and let it go at that. Give God your "Greetings" and be done with it. But, don't expect anything

in return. You should get over your notion of prayer as a kind of childish "gimmie." After all, is it not a more lofty conception to think of prayer as quiet reverence and respect for the Higher Power and not a matter of begging?

To which advice I mutter to myself: This, too, is a solution. But, somehow, it does not satisfy. It may, indeed, be a lofty conception to pay respects to Deity. But—I really want some things that are possible only for a Deity to grant. Sometimes I feel lofty in praising the God of the Universe for having given me the chance to live and not asking for more; but in times of need—and there are many—in a time of crisis, I find myself, as do others, calling upon Deity in spite of any such lofty conception. When tragedy comes, the call "O God" means more than a "how-do-you-do."

Says Person C: Hey! there, my advice to you is to keep on praying, asking, begging. But my further advice is: don't look for help from outside. Your help comes from *within.* In the *exercise* of prayer, all of its benefits come.

To which advice I mutter to myself: This, too, is a solution. I have tried it. But the peculiar thing is that when I get conscious that prayer is *mere* self-discipline I soon find myself giving it up. I lose the benefit as soon as I realize that I am talking to a reflection in the mirror. I grant that there is a lot to auto-suggestion; but prayer, if it means anything at all, means more than mere mental exercise. Doesn't it?

Says Person D: My good fellow: Take the advice of Pascal. The heart has reasons that reason knows not of. Quit *thinking* about it.

To which advice I mutter to myself: This, again, is a solution. But the skeptic in me will not so easily let me down. I cannot say: Reason: thou art a false goddess. It is too much a part of me. I simply cannot pronounce anathema upon it. Unless reason goes along, my plight remains.

And so, I come back to myself. I have interviewed four people and they are representative of four modern ways of meeting the difficulty. But, frankly, they have not helped me.

Scene II. In Which the Believer Wins Over the Skeptic.

The years pass. Sometimes I believe; sometimes I am wholly committed to denial. Problems remain. But problems have a way of never remaining quite the same. Solutions gradually emerge from new slants on things. I find the believer in me is getting itself asserted—more and more. Human nature, at heart, is heroic and positive.* The skeptic is still there. It will always be there as long as a man thinks. But it isn't so formidable.

Says the believer in me now to the skeptic within me:

First: To have faith in prayer one has to believe in a God. Prayer does not argue for God; but God is involved in praying. This sounds truistic. Perhaps it is. The skeptic's trouble, in other words, is not so much in the matter of prayer as it is with the question of God.

Second: To have faith in prayer one has to learn with patience what symbols best characterize God. The skeptic's trouble may not only be that of atheism; it may be that of bad idolatry: the kind which sets up a symbol not representative of the real or true. When we ask for something we must be sure we are addressing ourselves to the right party. I may ask: O God, hurl thy vengeance upon my enemy. But such a prayer may better be directed to the Devil. Moreover, to say that God cannot answer prayer because of natural law is perhaps to assume that natural law is a kind of prison in which a helpless Deity is confined. Natural law *as Necessity*

* See pp. 34, 35.

then may turn out to be a greater than God, hence a Bigger God!

But I am no longer disturbed by the cry of natural law. No reputable natural scientist today claims that natural law is absolute necessity. It is but a name covering average behavior, a name for orderly processes, a statistical average of tendencies. If natural law is but a name for order in the Universe, why could God not answer prayers in an orderly way—according to natural laws? I need not ask for an upset of order; that would perhaps be another form of idolatry. But I can believe that order can be met with order. What is seemingly impossible from one point of view may be possible from another—even on the plane of order. What is "miraculous," unorderly, to some, may turn out to be commonplace and orderly, properly understood.

Third: To have faith in prayer one has to consider oneself. I may be insignificant from the point of view of stellar space and geologic time. But many values are not measured in that manner. Unless I keep faith with the premise of my own personal, potential worth, unmeasurable by physical standards, I have ceased praying before I have begun.

Fourth: To have faith in prayer one has to be sure that one is asking, not demanding. To ask is one thing; to demand is another. Asking constitutes prayer; demanding is of the essence of magic. Prayer is not magic.

Fifth: To have faith in prayer one has to consider the other party. If God is great enough and good enough, the answer may well be entrusted to that which is greater and better than myself.

Sixth: To have faith in prayer one must be watchful of results. Prayers may only *seem* unanswered. Answers may come but we fail to recognize them. We may have entertained angels unawares.

Seventh: To have faith in prayer is not to deny the fact of auto-suggestion. Auto-suggestion is only a psychological mechanism. By means of it, as an orderly process, Deity may well be at work as in the case of the reasoning processes themselves or as in ordinary experience.

* * * *

And so the believer says to the skeptic: There is no disgrace in being a doubting Thomas. Honest doubt may well deepen faith. At any rate, it saves faith from being cheap and superficial. Doubt has its rôle to play; and no religious leader in human history has escaped from it. Not even Jesus (e.g., at Gethsemane).

The skeptic in me has made his contribution. It says, first, I must question. Then as it matures it says: I must learn *how* to question. There is no virtue in mere doubting. Anything can be doubted. Any Tom, Dick or Harry can doubt any conceivable answer. The virtue lies in the recognition of the limits to doubting. The mature student is not one that merely asks questions; he is mature by virtue of the *kind* of questions he asks. There is maturity in this matter of prayer as anything else. There is no harm in asking Deity for the whole state of Texas. But, what would be the point? Suppose the petitioner earned the right to possess all of Texas according to the standards set by a Supreme Giver? Learning of such standards he would be fearful of such possession, sorry for having prayed that kind of prayer. It may be wiser to ask for a more humble gift which makes demands more in harmony with our ability to employ—in the light of the returns legitimately expected by the Giver. "To him who hath much, much shall be required."

To say that answer to prayer can be explained in some other

way is to utter a truism. Any explanation offers the possibility of numerous other explanations. The question is, which is the more reasonable, the more valid, in the light of the whole?

And finally, the believer in this twentieth-century is no longer disturbed by the skeptic who asks for proof. No up-to-the-minute mind asks for unimpeachable proof.* Not even in the vocabulary of the modern mathematician is the word proof a synonym for finality. (He is always aware that "proofs" rest upon premises.) We are learning to be content with possibilities and probabilities. And that is what the former generations called "faith."

Prayer then, at the very minimum, is a possibility. But, in the words of William James, who wrestled critically with many typical religious beliefs and practices, it is more than a possibility. Like many other religious affirmations, prayer belongs to that class of options which are genuine and living and, because of certain personal encounters with life, force many of us to lift it to the plane of solemn, positive declaration among our beliefs.

* See pp. 18, 19.

CHAPTER XII

The Wheel of Fortune

DO THINGS HAPPEN to us because of chance or are they meant to happen?

This question comes from the lips of every one at some time or other. Especially in times of distress do we wonder whether the hands of the wheel of fortune are weighted to stop at a given number or if, unweighted, they merely stop where they stop.

It was the fashion, some generations ago, within a widely respected branch of the Protestant church to hold the doctrine that whatever happened was a part of the Divine decree. So many are predestined to go up, so many to go down. The will of God, however, being not only all-powerful but also benevolent, whatever befell sons of men, under God, was held to be for the best. The difficulties inherent in such a doctrine when carried out logically were evident: God then decrees men's evil ways as well as their good; those who go to hell (so it was said) are furnishing background for those going to glory, the damned contributing contrast to the saved. But what about God's character if he elects some and rejects others? Such a god is less good than an average family father who is solicitous for the whole of his brood, even for the most wayward. There was, of course, the difficulty, too, that if we are predestined, then there is no praise or blame to any of our acts. If I commit murder it is a part of the Divine plan and surely I am not to be blamed. If I am sorry for my misdeed

there is no genuine sorrow for the sorrow itself is a part of the Divine decree. There are no moral acts since there is no responsibility.

Those churches which taught such a hard doctrine soon saw that it needed modification. God, if blamed for everything that happened, would turn out to be questionable character Number One in spite of his supposed absolutely good will. Men would be but puppets of circumstance, mere tin soldiers under the benevolent-Tyrant's Christmas tree. Surely, men must be free or else there is no point to all this struggle and moral endeavor.

When the need for such a revised doctrine became clear there were other difficulties which came to view. Can man's freedom really be asserted? Does not nature itself (leaving out the consideration of God) make us what we are: time, place and circumstance? The more you think about it, apparently the less do you find that you are free. Suppose you understood all the factors that go into the making of what you are: your father, mother, sisters, brothers, your town, your school, your digestion or indigestion, your looks, your economic situation, your type of education, your school-teachers,—what are you but the product of all these! "Give me some healthy normal infants," said a psychologist (in so many words) a few years ago, "and I will make of them anything you want: first-rate garbage collectors, first-rate spinsters, first-class dreamers." The early environment conditions the whole of life. We are what we are because of our surroundings and formed habits. And there are many who say that if only we knew enough about the factors involved we should have to say that we are nothing more than the end-result of all that has gone before, machines which think they have freedom because either they are ignorant of the causes or that their thinking so is itself an end-result of other causes.

There are good arguments *pro* and *con*—for human freedom.* I can muster some convincing considerations which assure me that I am but a cog in the chain of circumstance; I can also point to counter-considerations which convince me that I am, in some measure, a free being and responsible. This piling up of arguments on both sides, it is clear, can be done upon any subject if one goes deeply into it. We shall not state these arguments here but only give a sketch of some conclusions in the matter which may help clarify the problem and contribute to our beliefs.

Are we free? Yes: within limits. No person is free to do anything under the sun. I may want my body to disappear when I see a strange dog making a plunge at it; but I am not free to do so. The student may want to be free to look through the covers of his closed book when called upon in class; but he is not thus free. I may want to be an archangel but I cannot. I may feel free to crush the blackboard with my fist; but there is a point beyond which if I hit it with any more vigor I shall not be free to have a fist to hit with. I may feel free to run my body into the wall with the intent of annihilating it; but if I do, I may lose my freedom in the body forever. The only kind of freedom that is genuine is the freedom that goes along with, that fits into, the world as *it* is. To put this in other words: a man is free only under the law. If there were no order I should never be free. What would the world be like if, freely, anything might happen? It would be a crazy world, a mad-house, if there were the kind of freedom which implied that anything or anyone could carry on as it or he pleased. No order, no freedom; no law, no liberty. We are free *within limits.* And the limits set are the limits of an

* Some of the major arguments are listed and discussed at some length in my *First Chapters in Religious Philosophy* (1937), Chapter IX, entitled "Human Freedom and the World of Reality."

orderly world. To understand freedom, then, one must consider what kind of world of order this is; one must study the character of this world. And this only means to be intelligent about it. Both order and freedom make possible what we know as character; for character is no less the result of consistent habits, patterns, ways, than it is of freedom.

But: are we free even within limits, and, if so, how? Freedom here means that there are elements in the ongoing process of life which are unpredictable, uncertain, even though we knew everything that went before. There is such a thing as chance in the world. Always within limits. It used to be said that if a horse were confronted by two hay-stacks both of which offered equal satisfactions to the horse-palate and horse-stomach and if the horse stood equally distant from both of them and there were no other conditioning factors either way, and the horse's choice for one stack was balanced by the choice for the other, it would stand there and starve. Faced with equal alternatives and equal motivations, it would not move in the one direction or in the other since there was nothing to move it. This, of course, is pure foolishness. As a matter of fact, the horse would go to the one rather than to the other. The horse's "will," we say, enters the picture and "decides." Whichever stack it "chooses" will be a matter of chance since there are no other factors.

May it well be, that we (like the hypothetical horse) find ourselves in circumstances which furnish us equal appeals? The fact is, we do *experience* situations which offer equally inviting responses. We know this by the effort evoked "to make up our minds." We find that there is that little residuum of self-power which is the determining factor in the situation, called our "choice." Of course, it can always be said that there was some factor which rushed in to determine the choice. But this *may be* only to admit the truism: that for any view there

is the possibility of substituting another. In the case of the horse, it is possible to say that one eye saw more clearly than the other, or that the horse is left-hoofed rather than right-hoofed. If such were the explanation, the illustration of the horse and the hay-stacks does not illustrate since the factors favoring each would not be balanced in terms of the other.*

As conscious beings we do experience choices, not all the time, but some of the time. There are occasions when we take our stand deliberately and resolutely; we wish we really did know which way would be the better; but not knowing the outcome and after weighing the several considerations we resolutely tip the scales and make the choice. To deny this is to deny our very selves as we know ourselves; our experience of this is as much a part of us as our reason and logic which reflect upon the experience; and, what is more, our accumulated experiences, in this regard, do confirm our feeling of responsibility in certain of our acts. Indeed, we may be wrong in some of our feelings but this is not to imply that we are altogether wrong—unless there be no sanity whatsoever in the world of experience and reason.

The outcome of such "small" choices may determine, in a large part, the rest of our history. The tiniest of choices may be momentous. Shall I or shall I not take this train? Perhaps I shall wait for the next. Perhaps I shall take this one. May such a choice make a difference? Who knows, if I had taken the other train I may have met someone who would have entered my life and changed the whole course of it. These little choices of ours play a major part in the drama of life, —how great, we do not realize! You do not have to think of freedom in terms of "big choices." The "little ones" are big enough. That is one good reason why we say to ourselves: life

* Looking back upon the event, there is a natural tendency to look for a causal series and ignore the factor of sheer choice.

consists of "breaks," good and bad. That is true. We hardly realize when we are entertaining angels or demons unawares in our simplest choices. It is interesting to speculate, as we look back on the course of our path, what might have happened if we had not gone to such and such a party and casually or deliberately raised our eyebrows that eighth of an inch!

This brings us to consider our choices in the light of the wheel of fortune. We are free within limits. Our little choices do make a difference. But what about the Universe? Does It, so-to-speak, have a hand in what befalls us? Is the wheel of fortune Fate or Chance? I believe the answer here is the same as that above: the Universe exhibits both Fate and Chance, Fate in terms of some orderly process and Chance in terms of freedom within its own limits. Let us consider this point at some length.

In spite of the difficulties of the predestinarian doctrine which has played such a large rôle in the history of thought, many people, I am finding, believe in this doctrine to a very great extent. They say, after something dreadful has happened: "It was meant so. The time was up." Here is the case of a Cleveland fireman who, through the years, found himself in repeatedly hazardous circumstances, who climbed the highest of ladders, who plunged into smoke-filled rooms, who rode at high speed through crowded streets, who has had his body singed a score of times by flames. He came through each time. The long years brought him to an honorable retirement. And within one week after the pension had been granted, he climbed three or four steps on the house-ladder to fix a curtain for his wife and drops to the floor with a broken neck. What of such a thing? Was it fate? Was his time up?

Here is a noted physician who saves hundreds of lives by

his medical and surgical skill but loses his only son in the tragic circumstance of a small infection. Score upon score of cases could be cited of men who went through the thick of battles in the World War and came out unscathed but who, soon after, met their death in some trivial accident. Now, it is very comforting: this belief that one's days are numbered by an irresistible Fate. There can, then, be no remorse; things have to happen. Many people find solace in the thought that the date is fixed, that events are predestined by a higher power. I myself wish that I could whole-heartedly and without any doubt believe such a doctrine. It would save much worry and there would be incomparable comfort in believing it. But I find that I cannot accept it without certain reservations. It seems to me much more hazardous to my total religious beliefs to deny personal responsibility by blaming Deity —where, perhaps, there is just such responsibility and where such Deity may be innocent—than all the solace that goes with such a doctrine of predestination. And yet, I am coming to have some regard for it, if it is qualified very considerably. Let us see how both Fate and Chance may play a rôle in what happens to us.

The Roman Catholics have a very defensible view to help us in the matter. It was thought out (with the help of Aristotle) by St. Thomas Aquinas, the great systematizer of traditional Catholic doctrine, now regarded as the patron theological saint of their church. Aquinas held that for every event there are at least two causes: the intent and the initiating movement. For instance, I am sitting at this typewriter. I have in mind the intention of this paragraph. This intent plays into my pounding these keys. The result is a thought mapped out on this paper. There are at work here (at least) two causes; and they are at work at the same time. The words of this paragraph are the result of the keys pressed against this

paper; the keys have been selected in a certain order; and a picking process has been going on to give this order; meanwhile, back of it all, is a viewpoint which the writer has in mind which is giving direction to the whole. I find that the keys do not always obey as they should; my thought is now and then interrupted by the ribbon which sticks or by the pressure upon the wrong key or by the puzzle of the spelling of a word or by the fact that I have written off the sheet on the rubber. A hundred obstacles come in the way. And the thought is impeded and even somewhat changed by these interruptions. That two causes (and more) may operate at the same time is a fact of our commonest experience. Aquinas held that Deity has intentions and employs its intentions through and by means of free-willed individuals who, though they impede the realization of these intentions, nevertheless are being directed without the impounding of their freedom. Let us try to see this.

I have come to believe that human persons really have a definite purpose. They belong to a realm of nature in which the category of purpose is very significant and real. I believe in their freedom to thwart such purposes; but I believe that though those purposes are thwarted now here and now there they are eventually realized. I seem to see this written in the book of nature (particularly, the biological processes) in a very broad way; and I see it with more force and meaning in that realm of nature where intelligence is manifest.

Suppose we grant this statement. (At least, it is a reasonable hypothesis.) How does the Universe fit into the picture? I believe the answer has been given by Aquinas. There are at least two causes at work simultaneously: the intent of nature (or the intent of *that* in nature to be termed Deity) and the immediate intent of the individual. It is something like the professional chess-player at our carnivals: he goes around and

makes his moves after the players have made theirs. He is quite unaware of what their next move will be, but their moving having been made he knows almost at a glance (as a professional) what he must do next. His intention guides him all the way through; but he can realize these intentions only as he matches the plays of those who from their non-professional viewpoint freely choose their moves. This analogy (somewhat after the one made famous by Professor William James) is not to be taken merely as a competitive game between the Universe and finite individuals (no analogy walks on all fours); but it is to be taken in terms of the relation of Fate and Chance. It is possible to believe in both, each acting simultaneously with the other, from this viewpoint.

If there is real chance in the world, real freedom, the detailed course of events can never be predicted, not even by Deity Itself. We are no longer bothered by the doctrine of divine omnipotence. As long as there is asserted one grain of freedom, the doctrine of omnipotence becomes qualified to that degree. Nevertheless, Deity may have the wisdom and the power to meet challenging situations and bring triumph to a seemingly lost cause, of bringing about the realization of high intentions even though there are innumerable obstacles. In our chapter on Destiny we shall have something to say about obstacles: that they play a major rôle in a *meaningful* world.* We believe that there shall always be such frustrations wherever there is a world of moral meaning and moral purposes.

I come then to answer the earlier question: is everything that happens to us a result of Fate or Chance? The answer: it

* The chess game analogy carries a further meaning if we think of the world as a stage in which a drama of morally meaningful purposes is being wrought out, a drama in which there are real obstacles in the way of real achievement. But more on this point later.

is the result of both. I cannot blame the Universe if I, knowing better, step out in front of an approaching car and am injured. I cannot blame the world if, knowing that alcohol taken in large quantities is not conducive to the best health, I continue to imbibe without restraint and suffer mental and physical harm. I cannot absolve myself if I live a life of dissipation and cut short the years. Millions of us commit suicide gradually by our follies. And yet: what happens, whatsoever happens, can be turned into some better phase by a higher wisdom which carries with it high purposes. If an untimely death takes place, it can be turned into a good—if there is in this Universe a power that is of high purpose, one that possesses wisdom even though not a hundred-percent omnipotence, one that transcends the limitations of the here and now. "Why are the people crying?" asked the little boy of his parents when he was informed that a neighbor had just passed on. "Don't they believe in heaven?" There is a subtle indictment not only against the sophistications and frozen beliefs of adult minds but against the Universe in this child's question. If there is a Power which transcends the space-time order of this world, surely it can bring to fruition a life that has been lifted out of that space-time world in the experience commonly called death. If that Power is sufficiently strong to direct an establishment as complex as is this world, surely it is strong enough to bring to realization its long-range purposes. And if these purposes are high, nothing whatsoever that is good can eventually be destroyed forever. Power linked with Wisdom and with High Moral Quality is sufficient to alleviate our feelings of *utter* frustration. We need not run to the doctrine of predestination to make things come out right, to give us the solace we sorely need. There is solace sufficient in the thought that a higher good—higher than we now can know—is the real and the timeless and the basic drift of things.

An interesting and important question presses upon us at this point. Are we born into this world by Chance or by Fate? Certainly we were not born of our own free will. I believe the answer here is the answer of the type of the two-cause explanation. Consider the element of chance. If I wrote out a proper fraction, with the numerator being one, and its denominator written across the whole length of this paper, such a fraction would hardly represent the odds against my having been born in this world. If all the great-grandpas had not met the great-grandmas I should not be. If mother had only not gone to that church festival where she was introduced to dad, I, a psycho-physical being, would not have appeared. Biologically speaking, the chances against the particular confluence of germ-cells in procreation which went to make up my physical body are so great that I wonder, after all, how it came that I and not my potential brothers and sisters came to be. By the most appallingly complex and baffling sets of circumstances am I here in this physical world. To think about all the odds against my having been born gives me the feeling of eeriness. Am I, then, *chosen?* Surely I am of the elect, if they who live in this world are of the elect.

When men have looked up toward the starry sky through their powerful telescopes and have in some measure understood the apparent orderliness of this Universe with its countless suns and planets and galaxies—an amazing thing, indeed, that the whole thing has not collided and busted ages ago—they ask: really, did all this come to pass by Chance or by Fate? And they say: well, we *can* say Chance; but to say it is too great a strain on the imagination. And they remember that a good rule of thinking is that that view is more probably true which is less a strain on the imagination. Yes: it all may be said to be due to Chance; but it looks more like Fate, a Power, a Directing Agency, call it whatever you will.

Surely, it wears the appearance of an Order back of this order. There may be chance elements in the total picture but there is something too stable about it all to say that there is no fundamental, underlying unity, order and power back of it all. Now, when I consider myself, my physical self, my body, I think of the chance-events that lie behind its history. The odds are all against my body ever walking the face of the earth. And yet: am I, I ask, the result of mere Chance? Am I nothing more than an accident? The answer can be put in the same way as the answer to the question about the suns and planets: it is possible to say that everything is the result of chance. But: such an explanation (which, in a sense, is no explanation) is a greater strain on the imagination than that of Fate. I appear to myself, at least in my better moments, to mean something, to feel some mission, to be of more than passing worth, to have some higher Destiny, to have a place or a call for something noble and great (even though I am aware of my constant limitations and failures). I seem to myself to be *chosen*, to be elected by the Universe, to be here—and for some purpose. Of course, I may be wrong here as in anything else. But (to repeat), I follow the law of good thinking: that view is more reasonable which is less a strain on the imagination; and to imagine that I am a mere accident is just such a strain. I follow also my feelings in this matter, and the testimony of millions of others who, throughout the ages and under the most diverse cultures, have had the similar feeling that we are somehow sons of God with a purpose and a destiny.

But there is one important word more. When we say that we are born into this world with the odds against our having been born we must make it clear that these odds concern the biological and physical features: they concern our bodies. They do not include the history of our real self. Just when

our real self begins or when it is born into the world is a question that has bothered thinkers all through the ages. Some say that we have lived before in another sphere and there is some slight evidence for it in the awareness, at times, of some of us that we have lived before; we get a feeling that there was a home far, far away; and certain inquiries into the nature of knowledge suggests that we must have learned long, long ago.* Some say that our self was procreated with the body; some say that our self is a product of the body when developed at a certain embyronic stage; some say that our self has a birthday the same as that of the appearance of the body in the light of this world; some (with Aquinas) say that our self is a special creation by God.

Now, it must be said, that the self and the body, though, as now known, intimately related, are not the same. The one transcends successive time-moments, it is spaceless; and the other is spaceful and timeful. We shall make much of this distinction in the next two chapters. If this be true, the chance-theory of our existing in this space-time world does not cover the self other than by giving to it the kind of body, of nervous system, for better or worse, it shall have commerce with during this sphere of existence.

My own belief in the matter is that Fate has come in to join hands with Chance. Our real self belongs both as to its quality and character to a level which transcends the merely physical. I do not say, accordingly, that I have pre-existed nor

* The interested reader should look up Plato's thought of pre-existence. See his dialogue called *Meno* in which he reveals the remarkable innate knowledge possessed by an uneducated slave boy. There is something uncanny about mental powers which cannot be explained by accumulated experience as such. To believe that the mind has existed before the body is not a whit more difficult and unreasonable than to believe it exists after the body. Shelley is supposed to have accosted a three month's old baby to reveal its inborn knowledge. The mother protested that the child was not old enough to speak. Whereupon Shelley remarked: "So much the better, it has had no chance to forget."

do I say that I have not. I feel bold enough to suggest that there are times when I feel that I have. I have the strong feeling that this planet and these environs are not adequate surroundings for my real self. There are more times than one, when I wish I did not have to stop and stuff potatoes into these physical intestines, that I did not need to get these legs going in order to be physically and socially near someone, that I did not have to bother with a fever of 103.6, that I did not get a pain in the back of the neck while I sit and think my thoughts. There are more times than one, when I feel that I would be glad to be rid of this body; I feel that there is so much to do on the mental level, my real self. There are more times than one, when the body does feel like a prison-house (as Plato long ago suggested). I feel stranger to much in space and time and a comrade to those who no longer are in the body.

Are such feelings abnormal, aberrations of the mind? I do not think they are. I feel that Fate, Destiny, a Power which is great enough to steer the course of the suns is the same power that gives me the feeling of significance and importance. There is something that makes me feel that, though I may say that chance-elements have played their rôle in the fashioning of my special type of earthly existence, my real self is fated. There may here be the confluence of two co-causes: the chance elements which brought me into commerce with this body and the Fate that I should even be in this world. That I do not possess a clear-cut memory of the long yesterdays does not concern me; I only realize that a world of spirit can hardly be visualized or made concrete in a world where there are so many limitations as the one in which spirit and physical body are now somehow linked. I have no objection to the Roman Catholic doctrine that the soul (self) is created; at least such a doctrine is less a strain on my imagination than

the one which says that the body grows a soul as it grows corns on the toe, or nails on the fingers, or an appendix on the intestine. However, if the doctrine of creation in this matter is sound, I should not limit that creative act to a mere snap of the Divine fingers; creation for a time-transcendent power is a time-transcending act and as such there is no birthday and no death whatsoever in such a realm. I may have a birthday of the body in the world but I do not possess a birthday as to my real self. For that self belongs to the level where time-as-we-know-it (succession) does not apply nor to the configurations of space-as-we-know-it.

What, then, about the wheel of Fortune? The answer is two-fold: this is a world of Chance *and* Fate. Without Fate there could hardly be any order or purpose or destiny; without Freedom and Chance there could hardly be any significant drama or high meaning. But I do not argue in terms of my wishes (though my wishes are not to be discounted). I look at the distant suns with the help of the professional astronomer, and I see with him both chance and fate; I look at the tiniest microcosm with the help of the biologist, and (unless he be committed to the grossest type of nineteenth-century mechanism and materialism) I see with him both chance and fate; I look within myself, and here I need no help, and I see the play of chance events but I feel a destiny; I look through the pages of human history and I find my testimony confirmed by countless of others who have passed this way.

Yes: Chance and Fate; but the greatest and the most fundamental is Fate without which things could not be or endure.

CHAPTER XIII

Belief and Shadows

ALL OF US, some time or other, fall into shadowy places. And these shadows may be so deep and so black as to blot out any trace of light and sunshine. We cry out in despair: "What's the use, what's the meaning of it all? Life is a cheap and empty thing."

It is good, now and then, deliberately to tear oneself away from the routine of life, those of us who are fortunate enough to be able to experience the normal plane of living, and walk through a hospital, a sanatarium, the city lock-up, the homes for the homeless, and consider such shadows. Just what does the patient think who lies helpless on a cot, day and night and night and day, weeks and months, with nature showing little response to the processes of mending or the undoing of what has been done? What is there in life for such? How hollow it sounds for us to say "Chin up, young fellow; courage is the making of a man." How little does the bouquet of flowers or the geranium plant betoken our feelings for that situation; the patient must see in the flower the thorn of the cactus. It is very easy to thank God for one's own health; but what about *them*? What can *they* say?

Our purpose in life is conditioned by what and where we are; it does make a difference in our purpose whether we have but one leg or two; whether we can see or not; whether we can stand up and walk or whether we must lie flat; whether we must be confined behind bars because of some emotional

twist that brought us into conflict with society and into disrepute or whether we may walk freely and in the vigor of health from our house unmolested by our neighbors. Our purpose in life will change with the years. What was our purpose early will not be our purpose as we rock in the rocker of old age; we may have wanted some day to ring the school bell as a life's work but we have found this later to be economically undesirable. Fortunate is the person who says, in late years, that he has found his life to square with his early purposes and his calling the best expression of his best purposes. We shall not all be so fortunate. Most of us will sigh with the years. Things have happened to us; little did we dream that life could be so rough; or that there were so many and such dark shadows all along the way.

Here is a girl who, as I write these lines, comes to notice: she must change her whole career because of a little mis-step on the station platform. The papers print her picture: she is holding a trophy which she won at a state beauty contest; and she really is good looking. Her career toward Hollywood and her reputation for grace and charm and pulchritude had already brought her the coveted contract. Her art of tap-dancing had already developed to a profession. Underneath that picture appear these unbelievable words: This girl's feet were amputated yesterday after the tragic accident this week when she tripped and was crushed under the train's wheels. Here is a boy who must sit in a wheel-chair the rest of his life because of some malicious germs picked up somewhere and somewhen which caused his limbs to become paralyzed. Here is—well there is no end to such shadows.

Some people call this cruel Fate. Some blame Deity. Some are heroic enough to blame themselves; but one cannot blame himself for everything that happens. "No matter how well you take care of yourself," said a specialist in a certain disease,

"you can't help it if it strikes you again. This is one of those diseases which gets you whatever you do. You do not have a natural resistance against it." Some people call it misfortune. And I think they are closer to the right word. For there is such a thing as good luck and bad luck in life. The world is full of uncertainties; one cannot predict even with heaps and heaps of data just what is around the corner. There are "breaks" in this business of living. Far better is it to call our experiences by such names than to place a blame where it may not belong. It is immoral to hold innocent people guilty; and it may well be that Deity is wholly innocent in this event.

In building our beliefs and considering our purposes we must, if we are to build well, come to terms with shadows. This may sound like the regular insurance-agent talk; if it so sounds, well let it sound. But no philosophy of life without a consideration of bad fortune is adequate or helpful or vital. Life is that way whether we like it or not. Our purposes will have to enclose such experiences if these purposes are not illusions. It is well to talk about "our purpose in life" and consider it when we are sound and healthy; but what is such a purpose in a life cast in shadow?

Sinclair Lewis has recently advised every young fellow in college to prepare himself for two or more jobs rather than one. This is sound advice. One never knows what one will be called on to do; and the man with more tricks than one in his bag is the man who can somehow get along. The last economic depression has brought home this lesson. The psychiatrist, Oliver, in his fine little novel *Victim and Victor* pictures the mangled life of one who in adverse circumstance was unable late in life to do the one thing which all his life he was prepared to do. There are many such tragic instances.

To build a meaning to one's existence requires a long look; one that will carry beyond the next hill. And to set up such meanings will require that one will consider such ideals which will carry on beyond episodes and circumstances. We shall continue to have our ambitions to do certain very definite things; but we shall find it necessary to have a perspective which will carry us on when these ambitions become thwarted. This is what we shall call our beliefs amidst shadows.

Here we turn back upon our former question: what may we believe about religion? It is a mistake to think of a religion as a help only when we are down and out; we have tried to show that a valid religion is a matter of concern with those things that, in the longest run of things, ought to matter the most—and we now add: in sickness as well as in health. The question of what is the value of a good religion turns out to be the question: What things *in the long run* ought to concern us most. Hence, when we ask "What is the purpose of life?" we are asking the same kind of question: "What ought to concern us the most in the long run?" This "in the long run" is very essential; for, as we have stated above, life's vicissitudes are such that, to carry on, we must include them whenever they come.

It will be the theme of this chapter to show how a religion, in a valid form, may help amidst shadows; how one may still envisage purpose though in the trough of deep frustration. We shall take the patient with a long drawn out battle with a disease, where hope for normal health is slight, as the epitome of shadow. How can a religion help him?

We have said that there are four general and fundamental constituents of any ideal religion: normal, sane, human wants will be sustained; a valid sense of values will be brought into relief; needs as well as wants will be called forth, *e.g.*, the

development of self into its better expressions, general economic security, congenial relations with others, development of the life of reason and critical insight, encouragement of the special virtues and graces of kindness, sympathy, self-respect, love of truth, generosity, forbearance, and the like; and a destiny will be envisaged which focalizes the best with the permanent and the fundamentally real.*

It is most evident that many of the darker shadows prevent the realization of many of these normal ideals; and this for the very good reason that such shadows are not the normal expressions of life. If sickness and pain were the normal thing, in the long run, it is highly doubtful that we should have survived this far in the evolutionary struggle. I am here referring not to those intermittent pains and sufferings which bring in their wake good results (such as pain warnings and such as those constitutive of the development of greater values); I mean those pains and frustrations which prevent normal living. A year in jail may be good for some people; a sore throat is a good thing as a warning that we must mend our ways of living; and so on. However, a bedridden person is thwarted in his desire to follow up his normal wants, such as good health, playing golf (or whatever the game), practicing normal courtship, planting potatoes. Again, such a person is prevented from making his own way in life which he rightly covets as a self-respecting person; he cannot provide for those dependent upon him as he desires and as he ought to desire; he cannot gain economic security but must accept it as a gift from others. Again, such a person may not complete his college education, never experience the thrill of winning honors (even though he has the ability) nor become an alumnus of any alma mater; nor can he travel and visit the tombs of Pharaoh, nor take a summer's jaunt in the bad lands of

* See pp. 76 ff.

South Dakota. Life has thwarted him in so many instances that it appears there is nothing significant left at all.

But, let us reconsider these ideals. Though the realization of some of them will drop out of the picture because of the shadows, this does not mean that all will drop out. There are still important ideals which remain to be realized. For some who are in the darkest kind of shadows there may be but three or two or even one left which have any significant meaning. But, and this is important, that one remaining ideal may be the most important, in the long run of things, and the very one which ought to be close to the center of interest even to those who are living normal lives. In other words, the last remaining ideal may be the one most fundamental wherever or whatever a person is. It is the common meeting place of both sick and well. Let us take that one remaining ideal as the rest fade among the shadows.

It is the matter of destiny. This, as we have said earlier, is the one thing, of all our wants and needs, which is the crowning characteristic of the religious attitude. We may envisage all sorts of destiny; but, as we have said, the one kind of destiny that ought to matter the most in the long run is that which sees the best as the permanent and ultimately real. The person in shadows may say: I cannot have this, or that, or this, or that; but the one thing I can have is still the best and most valuable even for me in these dire circumstances, something I can hold as permanent and real. What is such a "best" and the "most valuable"? In one word, it is one's own inner self. Whatever may befall this torn body, nothing in space or time can ultimately destroy *me*.*

This thought has been eloquently expressed in the following lines attributed to Ruth McEnery Stuart:

* In the chapter on "Reflections Upon Our Destiny" which follows, this point will be made clearer.

"Heigh, Daddy Dofunny, how you come on!"
"Poorly, my chile, poorly dis mawn.
I got de misery in my bres',
'n I got some heart distress.
My ole back's kinder stiff
'n my hands—dey 'fuse to lif'—
But, I'se well, praise God, dis mawn!"

"Heigh, Daddy Dofunny, how curious you talk!
How are you well when you can't even walk?"

"Hush, you foolish chillun, hush!
What's dat singin' in de brush!—
Can't I see de blue sky—
'n white clouds floatin' by?
Dis here ole back, 'n dis here twisted knee
Dey ain't me, chile, dey ain't *me,*
For I'se well, praise God, dis mawn!" *

I belong not merely to this space-time world; I am a member of the timeless and spaceless order; and this vision, this hope, this belief, this faith, this conviction, will carry me across the valley. No man escapes this wrestling with this ulterior problem, unless his life is taken before he has had time to reflect upon the impending shadow. Here is where a religious attitude is of peculiar worth. And such an attitude is not a hard one to attain. For, everyone who reflects upon himself, upon his nature, will find that he is a member of an order which transcends the physical world and the limitations and frustrations which accompany and surround that world. We are what our fathers called "eternal" beings. And nothing that happens to the body can ever nullify the timeless

* I am indebted to my friend Dr. Howard V. Yergin for calling attention to these lines.

and the spaceless. The kind of pains we now suffer are the pains which belong to a space-time existence; there may be pains in the other spheres of existence but they could hardly be of the same order as those associated with physical limitations. What purpose, then, to such a person?

The last remaining hope is to grasp the vision of that destiny which carries one on and through and on. And it is a vision which each one can have if only he will look into his own nature. Let him say such words as these: "This body is not I; I am connected with the body here and now but I am not that body; I am not the head, or the chest, or the heart, or the stomach; nor am I in any part of this body; I am beyond it; I am beyond time; I am beyond space; I am timeless; I am without form; and, though it is hard to say what I am, yet I know that I am, and that I am I." The practice of such type of thinking will give one the eery feeling of the transcendental (transcendental, that is, beyond the physical level); and it will not be long before one, thus acquainted with his real self, will catch the gleam; that our Destiny reaches out and out and out and beyond and beyond and beyond. This may sound easy talk for us who right now are enjoying good health; but, so far as I know, it is the only conviction that carries those who suffer across and there have been millions who have seen such a vision and have found their pessimism fade before something far greater and more significant.

The transcendental character of self is the key that unlocks the padlock of such despair. And it is a real key!

* * * *

Not all of those who are in shadows, however, are deprived of so much in the realization of normal wants. We

have taken those in the deepest shadows first. For others, there are still other ideals possible of realization: one may not be able to go to teas but one may still be gracious and congenial; one may not be able to go to college but one may still improve the mind; one may not be able to take part in public debates but one may still practice forbearance and tolerance toward those nearby who differ; one need not look very far, wherever one is, for the opportunity to extend the sympathetic look or hand to those who need such help; one may be rich and generous without money. There may be normal wants that still may be satisfied; many unfortunates have found a new interest, a new trade, a new skill, a new profession. And this brings us to a consideration of certain fundamental facts of all experience which those who are in shadow may reflect upon.

Everyone has his own world, however big, however small. Our interests create for us our world. If I like to play the piano I shall deny myself football, pool, thumbing rides for the sake of happy week-ends, and even perhaps a steady female companion. My piano, this room, my teachers, the conservatory, become my world, by and large. If I am to succeed I must deny myself of much that does not contribute directly to my goal. I may find, after a while, that, however much I try, I am not cut out for this thing as a life profession. What happens? I create for myself another world, a new one. This may be the world of sport or the world of meeting house-wives as potential subscribers to my selling campaign. This world, too, may change. All through life we build around us a world of interests which shuts out other worlds. This is normal and natural; it is a part of one's developing interests. Perhaps I am forced to change from a world of piano playing to a world of salesmanship; I lost two fingers in the automobile crash and the world is thus changed by

the force of circumstance. I must build again. We all build again and again. Very few have the same world all the way through; if they have they are either lucky or unfortunate; lucky if it is a world of gradual enfolding of some worthy ambition early visualized; unlucky if they have become so intolerably narrow that no new insights can be brought to bear.

Now, the *real* unfortunates are not those who must break with their worlds; the *real* unfortunates are those for whom no new world is possible. Even though our interests create our world, in some circumstances, we must create interests in other worlds. In other words, most of us must (and do) form new interests commensurate with the changing circumstances of life. The well, even as the sick, are faced with the same demands to change worlds.

I have met and talked with those who, from the viewpoint of normal human living, are to be called unfortunates. Most of us have. I have been struck by the fact that, in many cases, they do not regard their circumstance as unfortunate as we regard them. But this, mind you, comes from those who already have built for themselves a new world of interest. Here is a young man who must go through college and life in a wheel-chair. He tells me that he is fully adjusted to his lot. He has learned to create for himself his own world. Not being able to do what others are doing he can do more easily what others find more difficult. Fortunately he is given a good mind; and that mind is helping him to find his purpose and significance in spite of that circumstance. Here is one who is troubled with deafness; and yet, shut from noises and distraction, he is able to penetrate more deeply into the things of that inner world to which he is confined, with a capacity for concentration not open to others.

Now this is the way with all of us. There is hardly an ex-

ception to the rule. Even those who move on the normal plane have certain circumstances which force them to their kind of world. It may be the economic situation; it may be a poor stomach; it may be impaired eyesight; it may be some brain lesion. All of us are in the same category as those whom we regard as unfortunates; it is but a matter of degree or of specific interests. I have been struck again and again by the fact—when one experiences some unfortunate affair—how people come along and tell you of the skeletons locked up in their own closets. When some one close to you is taken by death, you hear how others have suffered similarly though they have said little or nothing. One is surprised to learn how universal is this business of worlds changing all around us even though we hardly notice such changes. An American philosopher of note lost his son by an untimely death. He was said to have remarked: "Well, I now belong to a company of fellow sufferers, to a hallowed circle, to which before I have been a stranger." Is there any balm in this? I believe there is. One in his misery will come to realize that he is not alone; and there is a solace in the thought that the Universe is not singling one out from all the rest and laying heavy hands on just him. All men must find their worlds crumbling; and they must learn the art of building other worlds to take their place. This we may not cherish; but this is the law of life. Let us not curse the world of change. Let us call some of our experiences a bad break from the viewpoint of what we wanted to do; but, at the same time, let us look for the possibility that such an "evil" may be turned into what we may call a value-greater. This may be the secret of victorious living and the purpose of conscious life.*

* For a fuller note on this point, see the chapter, "Reflections Upon Our Destiny."

The valid kind of religious perspective is not, we repeat, something that we are supposed to take up as an antidote to all these shadows. A valid religion is the one which reflects our holding on to those values which we may realize in spite of limited opportunities and circumstances. When a person has thus made the necessary adjustment and he is doing his job well and sworn his loyalty to those greater values, he need not seek for a religion; he already has one and he has the best type.

Happiness, for which men long, is not a matter of circumstance; it is a matter of inner attitude. This platitude is not so platitudinous that it does not bear repeating. It is a law of life. We shall have to learn to adjust ourselves to shadows; for they seem to be a part of a world that is value-creating. We shall also have to learn that there are all kinds of values; that perhaps the values which many people have thought to be great are really values less than those which circumstance has forced them to discover; that circumstance is itself a part of the developing process by which conscious beings move up the ladder toward their higher destiny which is beyond this space-time world.

Some years ago it was my privilege to hear Dr. Harry Ward of New York in a Sunday morning sermon. Professor Ward spent his life wrestling with social questions and under the fire of criticism had been speaking for the cause of the oppressed. The years marked him as a dangerous heretic, a radical, a man who had lost his perspective. He wrote books which many people would not read. Life had been kind to him in that it brought him a place and opportunity of responsible leadership, and, no doubt, of economic security. But, he did not lose touch with the great majority. He went into his pulpit that Sunday morning, looking not at all like a preacher; there was no indication whatsoever that he was

out to give his best sermon. He just leaned over the pulpit and talked; and what he said was about as moving and stirring as I have heard in a long, long time. It was the Sunday right after the Easter season. He spoke of how church people had celebrated the season of the resurrection: the flowers on the altars, the great Easter crowds and Fifth Avenue processions, the magnificent music, the best sermons. This, he said, was a frightful commentary upon the essence of Christianity. Church people think they rightly observe Easter by celebrating an event centuries ago. They think that by a display of goodwill they are revealing the greater Good Will. This, he said, was missing the whole point of their religion. To honor Jesus in this way is not to honor him; the songs of the hosannas are pitched in the wrong key. If they were really celebrating the spirit of the season, he said, they would be reflecting upon that fundamental paradox of the Christian religion which is the law of life: the way of life is the way of death; to die is to live longer. This, he went on to say, is the lesson for institutions and it is the lesson for individuals. We do not honor the Founder of the Christian church, possess the spirit of the resurrection, the Easter season, by shouting our hallelujahs, by our fashion parades, by repeating texts about the empty sepulchre; we honor the Founder and carry out the spirit of resurrection only as we re-consider how many experiences of death have come to us and reflect upon how many experiences of life, of new values, have been born thereof. No death, no life; no less value, no greater; no strife, no success; no difficulties, no achievements; no cross, no crown; no shadows, no greater meanings.

It may well be that troubled circumstances symbolize what Professor Ward was trying to say: the law of progress, of life, is the law of frustration, of death. A life that is surrounded by shadows may be the life that, in the long run, has in it

the quality of greater achievements, achievements measured not by the standards by which we are prone to measure but by those which move out and beyond into the transcendental realm of a higher world, more real. If it is true in the ordinary run of daily sunshine that shadows form a part in the noble drama of life, it is also true of those more extraordinary experiences when that sun seems forever hid.

CHAPTER XIV

Reflections upon Our Destiny

IN MORE THAN ONE PLACE in this book we have suggested that human hopes and aspirations are as much a part of the world of nature as sticks and stones and planets. Man himself—all of him—is as much a part of the picture as is the most distant galaxy. If we are to come to terms with the nature of things we must employ symbols of it which will reflect the characteristics of men's minds and hearts as well as the character of those elements which compose the dust.

The heart of man has been held, by so many religious thinkers in the past, to be essentially evil; he has been called by the most uncomplimentary names. Luther in an ugly mood and in a fit of rhetoric called man a "stinking carcass" and many epithets which are unprintable by the present standards of publication. Augustine called him a worm of the dust. Edwards called children little "vipers." Sons-of-the-devil is a stock-in-trade expression. We have suggested that there is good reason for such a caricature: men have in their religion often set the goal so high that in comparison with it they were nothing. It is true that we are far from the ideal; but it does not follow that we are mice.

I have been struck again and again by the manifestation of the other-side-of human nature. When life goes smoothly on we are not so apt to see it. But let something terrible or striking happen: an automobile accident, a Johnstown flood, a brutal attack upon some helpless and innocent

child, a king renouncing his throne for a love, a lover who experiences an unrequited love, the death of some dear one. How people come forth, share their sympathy, ask if they may help, cry with those who mourn, give words of encouragement, are moved to tears while listening at their radios to their king's valedictory, contribute to the Red Cross, really suffer with those who suffer. If one has ever had the experience (and how few have not?) one is amazed at the goodwill that comes from strangers and distant friends and how that goodwill cuts across any barrier of station, class, cult or separated interests. The sorrow we share with those who mourn, the almost instinctive desire to help along in whatever way we can, is the one tie that binds sons of men to each other; and it is a bond that is more deep and real than blood or station. Human ties which are broken by death are not broken. They continue so poignantly real, so deep into the heart, that they surely reflect something beyond themselves. No picture of this world and no theory of our destiny can ignore man's deepest affections. This is a world that produces wounds and scars but it is also a world that provides healing and sympathy and calls out deep and tender emotions.

Belief in personal immortality rests, by and large and fundamentally, upon this side of human nature. Its affirmation is quite simple: Nature provides such human nature. When tragedy comes—and death is a tragedy wherever possibilities of life are not realized in a measure comparable to them—we "instinctively" feel that this just cannot close that chapter. Whatever we may think of our own destiny we cannot feel indifferent to the destiny of those who have become so much a part of us. We say: such a person cannot ultimately die. And we do not mean that that person lives in us in blessed memory; we mean that such a person lives

on even as we live, although in a sphere different from ours.

Now, this is not the result of logical analysis. The fact is, we do not reason at all about it. We just assert. It *must* be. And this feeling of *must* is just as much a part of us as reason. Professor William James (as we have pointed out*) put it something like this: there is another side to our nature other than mere logic. No reason, he said, is fully "rational" (we have called it "encompassing reasonableness") unless it takes into its compass the whole life of man, his demands and his feelings as well as his intellect. Can we argue on this basis? The answer: We must.

One of the basic features of Immanuel Kant's great philosophy is centered right here: man's innate moral sensibility *makes* him *assert* a positive statement about life and its character. It will not down; it demands respect to itself. We may (he said) not *know* (by logic) that we are free but we are morally certain that we must be; we do not know (by logic) that there is a God but we are morally certain that there must be Something which will eventually bring justice and happiness into harmony and straighten out the injustice and unhappiness of people who morally deserve a better fate; we do not know that there is a life to come but we are morally certain that there must be such a life since four-score-years-and-ten are too short a span to fit the urge (that in us lies) to perform endless tasks.

Either we are living in a world of meaning and significance or we are not. If what people hold dear and lovely, affections and devotions that lift themselves beyond time and space, are but passing experiences without deeper significance then the world which has produced them only eventually to destroy them becomes a thing so fantastic and queer that we cannot

* See p. 17.

think of it other than *a world* that is, *in the long run,* meaningless.

Can then our emotional life be counted for something? It must be so counted. The emotions have counted for much in the evolutionary struggle. Animals live not by intellectual processes; they live on inner, sub-rational promptings and they have survived. Nature has not mocked them. If it had, the biological story would have ended long ago. What makes the mother of any offspring (and in some cases the father) fight to the death for those in the nest or in the trunk of the tree? It is instinctive, so we say. But that instinctive urge is shot through with feeling; it is emotive. Were that mother to consider in deep reflection the worth of that struggle to defend the offspring, if she were to go to an animal school and learn the reasons *pro* and *con,* she might, with Schopenhauer, find good reasons to put down her emotional nature and say that it is all vain and futile: for will not her offspring someday have to go through the same struggles? In the struggle for existence emotions have played an enormous rôle. Is it not reasonable that they should not only condition our beliefs but that they should serve as valid *grounds* for beliefs along with those beliefs which move solely in the realm of logic? Surely, nature, if fundamentally moral, cannot be mocking us when we feel deeply that those who are closer to us than anything else in the world, those who even mean more to us than we to ourselves, live on. We know that nature has shown meaning to the emotions far down the biological scale (e.g., survival value). May we not reasonably believe that, at the human level with their grasping into the far outreaches of time and space, such emotions have significance?

Most people have a hard time to visualize what such a survival is like. And this is not to be wondered at since we are dealing with concepts which, as those about God, are

abstracted from our experiences of the space-time world. We may "image" such survival only by symbols drawn from those ideas made concrete for us in the world of things. This is why people speak of "the heavenly throng," "the Lord sitting on a throne," "angels flying with wings," "the milky clouds upon which tread the feet of the saints of old," of "Moses sitting down at the same table," of "harps," of "dancing," of "the happy hunting ground." All these are symbols taken from whatever our culture. But we must think of them as symbols. We can form no *concrete* conception of a world which is not limited by space and time. Indeed, we know our own selves as beings who in self-consciousness, in memory and in anticipation transcend our bodies in time and space; but we have no *concrete* conception of ourselves without imagery which attaches to that time and space world. If I ask "*Where* is my soul?" I look in vain to find myself. The pineal gland is not the answer; nor is the chest; nor are the bowels; nor is the left ventricle; nor is the head. We are, though we know not *where. Where* is the thought which has fled but which may be recalled? In the subconscious? But *where* is that? Plainly, *nowhere.* It is not in space. The difficulty is evident: *we (as selves) are beyond anywhere*; we have no address (except the body) in the space-time world. We are not in the body or out of the body. We *transcend* the body. Indeed, we have connections with the body; but *we are more than these connections.* It is true that the body affects this relationship; we can run this body in the stone wall and disappear. But the connections are gone; not necessarily ourselves except ourselves-as-related-to-this-body. No harm, said the philosopher of old, can come to the soul; by which was meant that there is a realm which is beyond and above and outside physical categories. Even the saying of this is wrong; for it is not beyond or above or outside; it just is.

The same difficulty asserts itself in the matter of the birth of the *self*—the difficulty already discussed.*

To believe that we go on in a continued existence is not difficult. The mind is not the brain even though there is interaction between the two. One of the most remarkable things about us is that there is this connection; just how or where we do not know. It is a fact that the transcendental does have intercourse with the limited and the limited with the transcendental. But, miraculous as this seems, it is no more miraculous than other of our commonest experiences. I look through my eyes. Is this not a miracle? The whole life of sensation is a weird thing; we hear, but hearing is not the ear nor the nerve-current nor the vibrations; it is something else. I buy a suit and I say it is a blue suit. But is it blue? The light which surrounds that material, the distance from object to subject, the texture of the substance, the wave-lengths, the crest and the trough of those waves—these are not color. These are the *conditions* of color. No physicist has been able to define color as color; he presents the physical conditions of color. The color is a quality which the mind confers. It may not be in the mind; but the mind is the creator, the sustainer of it. I buy a chocolate candy-bar. But I do not buy sweetness. This I furnish. The sugar in that candy-bar is not sweet. There is no bunch of sweetness in the glass case. I buy a physical substance which when connected with the taste buds on my tongue gives a physical *condition* to an *experience* which I call sweetness. But the sweetness is psychological; sweetness is conferred by an experience. And so with beauty. Beauty is nothing without the mind that confers such quality. It is not necessarily in the mind; but the mind produces it. Everybody knows that pain is mental. Or why use ether? The mind produces the quality of pain, pro-

* See p. 178.

jects it (fortunately) in space. When I have a pain in my toe, I (a transcendent being) feel that pain but I project it (more often rightly than wrongly—another miracle) where it should be felt; I do not have the pain in my head but I place it out there in the toe. The mind works miracles of the first order. It possesses but is not possessed; it creates but is not created; it transcends but is not transcended; it projects but is not projected; it spacializes but is not space.

Religious teachers centuries before Christ have spoken of a soul. And they have added other entities such as spirit, breath, psyche, and what not. We still speak, with the Greeks, about the immortality of the soul. And many have believed that whatever else happens to us, the soul goes on. This is a mistake of the first order. *I* am the soul; I do not have one; *I* am spirit; I do not have one; *I* am psyche; I do not have one. Again, we speak of such other terms as ego, individuality, personality, self, subject, consciousness, sub-, super-, self-, co-, and un- consciousness. I do not have all these things; *I* am they. These terms should never have been taken as entities; they are functional; they refer to aspects or modes; they are the nuclei-expressions of the nucleus. There is no point in talking about the immortality of the soul if I do not go along with it. All these terms are more or less the *concrete* formulations of the abstract term "I." They are symbols, concrete in purpose, and not in themselves special entities.

When, therefore, I speak of destiny I do not mean the destiny of my soul or my spirit. I mean myself. And this "I" is transcendental, beyond the time and space order. It is of the essence of the transcendental that it is timeless (without the limiting element of measurable time) and that it is spaceless (without the limiting element of being somewhere). In this sense, we are eternal beings. We are above

and beyond the time and space order. What happens to the body is well known. But that does not affect the bodyless self. You never bury "So and So." You bury his body.

If it is true that we are time-transcending and space-transcending beings how can we ever visualize such a situation? The answer is of the same order as it is to the question of the being of God. We are here dealing with something that since it is abstract (beyond measurable time and space) cannot in itself be made concrete other than by symbols. And these symbols reflect time and space. We shall never, on this side of the line, know what it is like on the other; but we do not thereby say that there is no other. I do not know really what I am except symbolically as I "image" myself with the tools of space and of time; but I do not thereby deny that I am. No reflection in a mirror, no painting ever gives the person; they give back only what is there: the body, misshapen or Apollo-like, an existent which is so wide and so high and weighs so many pounds. I myself do not weigh at all; I am not so high, or so wide. I am what I am—beyond all that.

What then of our destiny? The great miracle of conscious human beings, we have said, is that there is commerce between the body and the self. That commerce works both ways: the body somehow affects mind and mind somehow affects body. Nature has produced this miracle: the miracle of the timeless and spaceless having intercourse with the space-ful and time-ful. How this is accomplished has never been satisfactorily answered either by scientist or philosopher. Men have tried to deny it in the interest of simplicity. But they have ended in denying other things. They have cured the headache but they have done something to the head.

Our destiny, then, relates to the here and now if this commerce is real. We are now affected by our bodies; even as our

bodies are daily affected by our mental attitudes. Even the life of asceticism, where the body is put under subjection, affects the mind. Pure spirit in this world is a fiction. It is spirit connected with space and time. Our space-time world, our environment, plays upon and molds the spirit. We are learning today that environment plays a more important rôle in shaping persons than we were inclined to believe. "You cannot change a person," it used to be said. "It's in the blood. What he is and whatever he will turn out to be is in the protoplasm; the environment cannot mold something that is not there to be molded." Well, this is partly true. Partly true it is in the sense that heredity is a factor; partly not true because we are very largely what we are because we happen to live north or south of the equator, happen to know this or that person, happen to be at this or that work. Experimental biologists tell us that the sexes of plants can be changed, that a plant can be made to grow blossoms or not grow them, at will: by changing the environment. The space-time world, in other words, affects the *life* of the plant and the plant itself; it also affects human spirits.

What is the meaning of this? You may ask: why should spirits if they are eternal have this episode in this kind of environment? Why not let them live and have their being in the transcendental realm which is their realm by nature? Why *this* world at all? To answer such a question is to assume the kind of wisdom that belongs to something more wise than ourselves. We, as finite beings, should not expect to answer every question satisfactorily. We may only conjecture.

There is a law of life that whatever goes through difficulties and tensions and achieves its end has achieved a greater value and significance than that which "arrives" without such difficulties and tensions. Take what is called success. The greater the difficulty, the greater the success. Anyone can

pick his teeth (if he has them); we do not call such a person a success. Not everybody could fly alone as did Lindbergh in "The Spirit of St. Louis," over the Atlantic; there were, then, too many hazards. But he who did it is called successful. Success implies difficulties. No difficulty, no success. No hazards, no character. No tensions, no greater value. If everything went along smoothly, all values would be monoform, uniform. There would then be a kind of pond-like system of values, no currents, no ripples, no greater and no less.

It may well be that spirit is connected with a limited sphere for the purpose of expressing values greater and less. This may be the ultimate explanation of Spirit calling forth the world at all. Or to use a former mode of expression: this may be the reason why God created heaven and earth. In the long course of evolutionary struggle there appears this emergence of values. Without such a setting, Deity Itself would be colorless. The world need not be considered to be an evil (as taught in many religions); it is value getting expressed in degrees. What we call evil is less-value. Some evils have more-value. For instance, a tooth-ache is a less-value for a person who must interrupt his work of greater value to attend to it. Such a tooth-ache may, however, be a more-value since that interruption may bring forth a greater value than that possessed before: it may bring life-companionship with the dentist's daughter who indeed may have greater value to the one who had the tooth-ache. It appears that this is a value-producing world and it is not a surprise that the center of all existence has been called by the category of value or worth.

Our destiny, it seems, is to achieve the more valuable in the only way that it seems possible, *viz.*, in a situation where there is always immanent the less-valuable. The more always implies the less. Why, then, should a transcendental spirit

such as I am have an episode with this so-called mundane, limited existence? The answer is the same as the answer to the question: why this world at all? And that answer seems to be this: here in this time-and-space world there is being unfolded a great drama sketched out by that which is the center of things: a situation where values are in the making in the face of the less. Could not such a drama have been worked out in another sphere of existence? The answer: such values, no doubt, are being worked out in other spheres; but, and this is a fundamental point, no value will ever be as great as that which has been worked out under the most difficult of situations. That is why, if we believe in angels, man, if he does achieve, is not a little lower than but greater than even they. We may speculate about beings achieving values in some other sphere; but such beings with their "achievements without-risks" could hardly compare with those of man, if he does achieve, who in the world of limited opportunities makes of them a success. It is the law: *that* value is more valuable which has come up out of difficulties than that which has had less such tensions. There is much truth, I believe, in the story of the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve may well have sat around and enjoyed apple trees and the prehistoric Jonathans or Mackintoshs or whatever they are called. But Adam and Eve forced out, by reason of a decision, of the garden and working by the sweat of their brows are a much greater Adam and Eve if they find themselves once more in the good graces of the Spirit which produced them. And what is more: the Spirit itself is greater in significance to have been responsible for such a world than a Spirit sitting around for ages and undertaking no hazardous tasks whatsoever. That is why the center of existence, God, is the Supreme Value: because the greatest values are achieved in situations of tensions and frustrations;

the Supreme Value involves risks in expressing its very nature!

We have a destiny. And that destiny has already begun for those spirits who are wrestling with the world, the flesh and the devil.

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